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Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers' Decision-making
for Literacy Instruction in Diverse Schools

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Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers' Decision-Making for Literacy Instruction in Diverse Schools

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2003

Dedicated to the memory of

Reverend Angela Marie Davis,

who always believed,

and of course,

to Delfina.

Acknowledgements

The first time I read a dissertation and saw the lengthy acknowledgements I thought it absurd; certainly writing a dissertation was a solo act, not an ensemble performance. I was wrong. Fortunately, I am blessed with wonderful people in my life, far too many to thank herein, but at least I can squeeze a few words of gratitude into these pages. Please know that all kindnesses, named and unnamed, are appreciated.

Gratitude to my committee members – Dr. Audrey Sorrells, Dr. Shernaz Garcia, Dr. Gwen Webb-Johnson, Dr. James Schaller, and Dr. James Scheurich - for the scholarship and humanity which they brought to this undertaking. A special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Audrey Sorrells, for the many lessons I've learned, in their myriad forms.

The people who keep the Department of Special Education up and running have been wonderfully patient, helpful, and kind to me. Many, many thanks to Heike, Phillip, and Aunt Carol. Heike, you've helped me stay the course more than you realize.

Students and teachers of all sorts have contributed to this project, directly and indirectly. Though they must remain unnamed, my appreciation to the teachers, students and administrators in the schools where data collection occurred. They opened their classes and worlds to me. Thank you.

Across the years my students have shared and taught me much; I hope that I have honored them equally. Many teachers, from Mom in our at-home kindergarten, my mentor from student-teaching long ago Melba Strickler, professors Dr. Henry Trueba and Dr. Alba Ortiz, to those people with whom I've worked throughout the years, have "walked on my heart", as Dr. Turner puts it. Thanks to all for teaching me to question, ponder, learn, believe in taking risks, and to act upon my beliefs.

Dr. Anne Fuller, Dr. Phyllis Robertson, Dr. Sarita Santos, and Dr. Bill Myers have shared their professional expertise, and much treasured friendship. Thank you for the laughter, the shoulders, and the words of wisdom. Rocío, Audrey T., and Melanie, you too have been supportive colleagues and caring friends. Thank you, thank you!

Contrary to some legends, a world does exist outside of graduate school. Many, many people beyond the university walls have helped me. My family, by all definitions, has been remarkably caring, supportive, and patient. My love to all of you.

Appreciation to Neeser for reality checks (though a few of mine bounced!), sparing me trips to the laundry mat, and introducing me to the gifted Georgia Wendy. Gratitude to Mercy for puppy-sitting, and more. Hoorays to Prabha for encouragement, puppy-sitting, and laughter. Cheers to Bernie for conversations and general merriment, as well as rolling my piano down 46th Street.

A great thank you to my parents, Anne and Richard DeCourcey, for teaching me the value of education, as well as the power of tenacity and sheer stubbornness. The apple did not fall far from the tree. Also, appreciation to my brother Jim, poster child for the occasional lecture and friend in abstentia, for always making sure I know just how old I will be next year.

Countless thanks to Carlson and Mags for so very much, including feeding that little, disheveled woman in the ratty green sweater, babysitting the raging beasties, and engaging in the occasional food fight.

Of course, nothing would be complete without mentioning the little bad dogs: Tallulah, Theo, and the baddest of all, Godot. Shocking though it may be, sometimes our children have four legs and fur. Throughout this endeavor, the little bad dogs and dog-wannabes have been loving companions, attentive

listeners, and justifiable excuses to get out of the house. Waiting for Godot has a whole new meaning.

Finally, my love and gratitude to J.P. who held down the fort as I muddled about the ivory towers, arranged rides for the sleepless, and saw beauty even in the ratty sweater du jour. I promise to remove “but I should be working” from my lexicon, at least on Sundays.

C.M.D.
Austin, Texas
December 2003

Kindergarten and First Grade Teacher Decision-Making for Literacy Instruction in Diverse Schools

Publication No. _____

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University of Texas at Austin, 2003

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to learn how teachers in culturally and linguistically diverse, low socioeconomic status schools explained their decision-making for literacy instruction at the kindergarten and first grade level. Two urban elementary schools served as sites for the study; one rated exemplary by the state educational agency, the other rated acceptable. Four teachers from each school participated. Data sources included: classroom observations, semi- structured interviews, post observation debriefings, teacher surveys and descriptive self-portraits, and document reviews. Themes emerged regarding their decision-making: teachers' varied understanding of literacy, teachers' perceptions of their teaching ability and efficacy, and teachers' perceptions of students and their abilities. Dimensions of excellence, characteristics and contexts of competency are discussed. Implications and suggestions for future research are proffered.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

"Education and literacy are fundamental human rights" according to Willis and Harris (2000, p. 76). However, some students struggle to acquire mastery of effective academic reading, writing, and speaking skills (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Within culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and low socioeconomic status (SES) populations difficulties acquiring literacy skills appear to occur with greater frequency than in white, middle-class, and English language dominant populations, although difficulties cut across all variables (Allington, 1991). National achievement data indicate significant disparities between groups - based upon race, ethnicity, home language, and SES (National Center of Educational Statistics [NCES], n.d.). In addition, special education serves a disproportionate number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (U.S. Office of Special Education, 1998).

Trajectories of achievement develop early in one's academic career, and seem inextricably related to successful literacy acquisition (Hart & Risley, 1995). Attempts to alter the differentiated trajectories that yield disparate achievement demand attention at students' entry points to formal education – kindergarten and first grade. Nationally, the No Child Left Behind Initiative (NCLB) purports to address literacy issues and eventually ameliorate disparate achievement in the United States (Department of Education, n.d.).

Historically, early interventions for literacy development emerged from a deficit model of students, their families and communities (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Menchaca, 1997). More recently, researchers consider teachers' practices and roles in student success, as well as more systemic concerns regarding schools and society (Scribner, 1999; Lloyd, et al., 1991; Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000). Concurrently, a growing community of scholars addresses issues of cultural and linguistic diversity related to schooling, such as disproportionate representation in special education and effective teaching (Harry & Anderson, 1995, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2001). Through exploration of teachers' decision-making for early reading and literacy instruction in low SES schools with large CLD populations, the proposed study represents a convergence of queries into early literacy development, teachers' practices, and diversity in education.

Literacy

Value of Literacy

The value of literacy - effective communication via text - is largely uncontested (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Effective communication is a requisite skill in our increasingly technological society; individuals who read, write, and speak well usually experience greater financial and social independence than their less skillful peers (NCES, n.d.). Although literacy does not determine one's long-term well being absolutely, effective literacy skills provide individuals with a broader range of options through which to access

schooling and careers. Literate individuals can more effectively navigate the world of commerce, social services, and education. Conversely, limited mastery of literacy may preclude access to knowledge, opportunities, and services (NCES, n.d.).

Literacy Acquisition and Academic Achievement

Early literacy acquisition enables individuals to amass knowledge and literacy-related experiences at a greater rate than those who later acquire literacy (Stanovich, 1986). The difference of the trajectory appears immutable; delayed acquirers of academic reading and writing proficiency seldom catch up with those individuals who acquire literacy early (Hart & Risley, 1995). Later remediation may assist the slower student to acquire skills, however it rarely alters the trajectory of knowledge and experience significantly (Hart & Risley, 1995). Consequently, it is imperative that early schooling accelerates literacy acquisition for those who manifest early delays in learning to read and write, for those students considered at risk for reading difficulties.

Interventions to Promote Literacy

Historically, research regarding those at risk for reading difficulties focused upon perceived deficits in the students, their families, and their communities (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997; Menchaca, 1997). Interest in reading and literacy instruction, and decisions for such instruction expanded during the last decade as political figures and the media campaigned for a literate society

(Willis & Harris, 2000). Condemning schools and teachers for failing to adequately educate all students, government and private organizations demand that all students be readers by the 3rd grade, and have inundated the educational process with standardized tests (Willis & Harris, 2000). Testing results show discrepancies in achievement between racial/ethnic groups, as well as socioeconomic groups (Hedges & Nowell, 1999). Yet, the social contexts of the tests remain generally ignored (Willis & Harris, 2000). More recently, investigators have begun to address the broader social, political and economic contexts of schooling. Discussion of issues regarding educational equity and opportunity within diverse populations exists, though somewhat limited in the mainstream (Meacham, 2001).

> Meanwhile, decisions regarding education often evade educators and researchers, but are determined by political parties and players; education is a much used and often volatile subject (Willis & Harris, 2000). The current presidential administration promoted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Department of Education, n.d.), to focus upon critical issues such as achieving equality through high standards and accountability, improving teacher quality, encouraging safe schools, and promoting parental options and innovative programs. However, some professional societies and organizations, such as Pi Lambda Theta, and Division L of

> American Educational Research Association (AERA), express concern regarding the operationalization of the mandates and design of NCLB. Pi Lambda Theta's Call for Presentations (Autumn 2002) suggested that NCLB "guarantees that most public schools will be labeled as failures within a few years." Division L announced a session for the annual AERA meeting in Chicago to discuss implications of NCLB (American Educational Research Association, Fall/Winter 2002). Outside forces such as policy and societal changes challenge teachers with increasing urgency (van den Berg, 2002; Willis & Harris, 2000).

Teachers' Behaviors

Classroom teachers possess great influence upon the effectiveness of schools. Citing Hawley and Valli (1999, p. 128), van den Berg (2002) avers, "Teachers prove to have a greater impact than program. This is true for average students and exceptional students, for normal classrooms and special classrooms" (p. 615). Behind the classroom doors, teachers determine how and what their students are taught. Although curriculum guidelines are provided, and in some instances curriculum is even scripted, individual teachers vary regarding scheduling, fidelity to programs, supplementary materials and experiences, focus of instruction, and in their professional preparation (Block, Oakar, & Hurt, 2002). The influences upon teachers' decisions include internal and external components

(Bandura, 1986), and vary across preservice preparation and experience, in-service classroom experience, and professional development (Calderhead, 1981).

Preparation and Professional Development

Teacher preparation at the university includes mandated courses and content; much required work represents technical skill development (Ewing, 2001). However, teaching occurs within a social context rift with issues of power and privilege; issues generally excluded from a mechanized perception of teaching (Ewing, 2001). Growing numbers of commentators call for a critical, reflective component in teaching (Bartolomé & Trueba, 2000) and teacher training (Ewing, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Ongoing professional development for teachers should provide opportunities to continue expansion of one's knowledge including instructional methods, content, and relevant educational issues (van den Berg, 2002). However in practice, policy and administrative demands do not guarantee acquisition or application of expanded knowledge (van den Berg, 2002; Bandura, 1986).

Teachers' instructional decisions appear predicated upon several issues (van den Berg, 2002). Instruction for literacy and reading appears especially susceptible to numerous influences outside of the classroom due to the increasing media and political coverage as well as ever-changing reforms (Willis & Harris, 2002; van den Berg, 2002). Although researchers have investigated teacher

decision-making in general, limited research exists specifically addressing decision-making for literacy instruction (Taylor, et al., 2000).

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Demographic Shifts

Within the United States, demographics are changing from predominantly White, Euro-American population to one including an ever-increasing number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) people from within and beyond the United States' borders (NCES, n.d.). These trends are especially prevalent in urban centers and the southwest, notably Texas and California. Therein, student populations in many areas are predominantly CLD, with many students for whom English is a second language (NCES, n.d.). Unlike the student population, the teacher population remains mostly White, middle class, female, and English-dominant (Broghman & Rollefson, 2001). Some commentators suggest that the demographic differences impede, or even preclude, effective education for CLD students (Kea & Utley, 1988). Conversely, other researchers argue that teacher preparedness determines students' educational success (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bynoe, 1998).

Effective Instruction for CLD Students

For successful teachers, developing common understandings with their students occurs with thoughtfulness and cohesion (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Such teachers manifest characteristics that provide them with a degree of resilience

while facing the many challenges of teaching (van den Berg, 2001). They demonstrate effective strategies for instruction and community building, accessing students' strengths to accelerate students' learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Instruction appears independent of validated instructional practices for less successful teachers (Taylor, et al., 2000). Issues of cultural diversity are seldom incorporated in meaningful ways, instead an implicit, single, normative culture pervades. Successful teachers promote successful learners; less successful teachers generate less successful learners (Taylor, et al., 2000). Consequently, because teacher success promotes student success, the need exists to identify and enhance strategies that advance teachers' efficacy and success.

Limited Research Relative to Literacy Instruction

The convergence of early literacy instruction, teacher decision-making, and culturally responsive instruction has garnered little attention in the academic mainstream (Meacham, 2001). Only in the past decade has educational research addressing culture significantly evolved beyond the deficit model (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). Although studies exist regarding education with respect to culture and language, early literacy, and teacher behaviors, as noted by Meacham (2001), the convergence remains generally unexplored.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to learn how kindergarten and first grade teachers explain their decision-making for literacy instruction, specifically teachers in schools with high CLD, low SES populations. The participating schools were rated differently – one acceptable, the other exemplary – by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). Unlike earlier studies of teacher behaviors, the teachers in this study were faculty in schools serving predominantly culturally and linguistically diverse students. Teachers' incorporation of strategies and content, as well as the cultural responsiveness of their pedagogy, were noted. Did teachers differentiate instruction for an students? If so, how? What role, if any, did issues of culture and language have in that decision? Finally, how do teachers explain their decisions for literacy instruction?

Interviews and observations probed teachers' perceptions and practices with respect to literacy instruction. Effective early literacy education can notably improve student success (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), therefore, kindergarten and first grade classes were selected. In addition, schools with similar populations, but different achievement status, based upon Texas State Education (TEA) ratings, served as study sites. Thus, similarities and differences between schools were also examined.

Statement of the Problem

Great numbers of students, including CLD students fail to pass high stakes tests. The achievement gap between CLD and non-CLD students persists (Hedges & Nowell, 1999), in spite of decades of debate and study (Erickson, 1987; Dunn, 1968). Concurrently, although research exists that demonstrates effective instructional strategies to teach reading (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), current practices fail to promote literacy for many students, especially CLD students.

Historically, studies of those students identified as not acquiring literacy focused upon the children and their families; increasingly however, scholars consider teachers' behaviors and attributes. Darling-Hammond (2000) reported, "while student demographic characteristics are strongly related to student outcomes at the state level, they are less influential in predicting achievement levels than variables assessing the quality of the teaching force" (On-line). Thus, to understand students' achievement and literacy acquisition requires that one understands teachers, including their choices of instructional strategies.

Many factors influence instructional decision-making: teachers' own experiences about what works, politics, economics, and popular wisdom of the day. Similarly, teachers' decisions about "what works," how they make meaning about their work results from many variables (van den Berg, 2002). Researchers have identified characteristics of teachers who appear to select effective instruction successfully (Taylor, et al., 2000). The particulars of teachers'

decisions for literacy instruction within the CLD population remain unexplored. To address the need for effective literacy instruction for CLD students, one must understand the decisions that teachers make for such.

Significance of the Study

Unlike much of the prior research that focused upon the general characteristics of effective teachers for CLD students, this study focused upon teachers in diverse schools and their decision-making, specifically with respect to literacy instruction. Although much recent research addressed phonological awareness and reading, little addresses skills such as phonological awareness in a broader literacy context that promotes educational attainment and prevents occurrence of problems learning to read (Solity, et al., 1999).

A qualitative investigation of teachers' explanations of their instructional decisions extends prior research by reporting teachers' lived experiences, their stated perceptions and practices, as well as their observed practices. Unlike studies that focus on the relationships of standardized test scores and teacher behaviors, this study concentrated upon factors that teachers identify as determinants in their selection of instructional strategies for literacy when working in schools with large populations of CLD, low SES students.

The study contributes to research and practice in literacy, teacher preparation, and teacher development. On-going implementation of research-based instruction confounds researchers; teachers tend to revert to former

instructional behaviors over time, unless continued support and feedback are provided. Numerous venues such as professional journals, workshops, and professional development programs disseminate best practices for literacy instruction, as well as culturally responsive pedagogy, however student outcomes and teacher observation suggest that use of such practices may be limited. Coburn (2001) asserted that "there has been little systematic research into the processes by which teachers' interpretations and adaptations occur [to policy and reform]" (p.145). Understanding the factors the teachers report to influence their decisions, in concert with observed teacher behaviors, provides insights necessary to refine presentation of research-based practices that exact long-term influence upon teachers, pre-service and in service.

Definition of Terms

Many of the terms used throughout the study hold multiple meanings. Common concepts, such as reading, can represent complex constructs. To promote clarity, word meanings within the present investigation are noted below.

Reading. Reading includes the ability to identify letters and their sounds, blend and segment phonemes, rhyme, identify words, and comprehend text (Snow, et al., 1998). Within this study, the term reading includes "functional knowledge of the principles of the English alphabetic writing system… [and the ability to] read some unfamiliar texts, relying on print and drawing meaning from

it." (Snow, et al., 1998, p. 15). The final component - draw meaning from unfamiliar text - is the end goal of reading instruction.

Academic reading achievement. Like reading, academic reading achievement can represent a broad range of behaviors and outcomes. Variability around the concept can confound and thwart efforts to measure learning outcomes (Snow, et al., 1998). Accountability proponents have used standardized test scores to assess achievement, although controversy engulfs such test use as a sole outcome measure. Additionally, differences in structure and scope, purpose, and administration settings can make comparisons of scores inappropriate. Within Texas recently, all students complete the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI), which predominantly evaluates letter and sound identification, sound blending, word calling, and vocabulary during their primary years. Concurrently, teachers administer the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) to assess students' reading of connected text, thus evaluating fluency and comprehension. As an attempt to provide uniform criteria of achievement across classrooms and schools, the DRA will be the measure of achievement. However, teacher and observer reports will augment those assessments, especially when the tests and observed student achievement appear to vary.

Socioeconomic status (SES). The words poor and minority represent different phenomenon, although sometimes their meanings are conflated. Herein, households are characterized as poor if the family income qualifies them to

receive free or reduced lunch within the public school setting. The term is used interchangeably with low socioeconomic status (SES).

Culture. Culture encompasses: " a group's individual and collective ways of thinking, believing, and knowing, which includes their shared experiences, consciousness, skills, values, forms of expression, social institutions and behavior" (Tillman, 2002, p.2). Critical to this definition is the concept of a shared, not monolithic, understanding.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD). The concept of culturally and linguistic diversity is predicated upon a norm of European American, middle to upper class, English speakers. Thus, CLD can refer to anyone who is not European American, middle to upper class. Within this study, CLD will include those groups who have historically been excluded by the dominant culture and experienced difficulties in public schools - African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans. The conceptualization of CLD rests upon problematic historical sociopolitical suppositions, which exceed the scope of the present study. However, the increased usage of the term in education provides an opening to address educational issues around self-identity, and the perceptions of others. The term minority has been used to include groups who have historically experienced oppression from a white dominant class; for example, within the United States, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans have endured marked colonialization (Giroux, 1992). The United States' history

of racialized descriptors provides context for the designations minority or CLD. However, the title minority (with respect to the ratio of African Americans and Mexican Americans to European Americans) is a misnomer in many communities, especially in urban areas, where school populations are composed largely of people of color (NCES, n.d.). Within this study, the term minority is used only within direct quotations from prior works, the phrases culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) or people of color will be used to describe groups of people who are African American, Mexican American, Native American, or may be perceived as belonging to those groups based upon physical characteristics or language (Feagin & Feagin, 1993).

At-risk for reading difficulties/At-risk. Students may be considered at-risk for reading difficulties if they fail to demonstrate certain competencies related to reading, such as in phonological awareness (Wagner, Torgeson, & Rashotte, 1994; Badian, 1998; Lonigan, et al., 1998). Within Texas currently, the TPRI is one assessment tool of student competencies in those areas in grades kindergarten through second. More global perceptions of risk underlie the Cumulative Risk Model (Hooper et al., 1998) which incorporates multiple "social and family risk factors" such as marital status, poverty status, maternal education, maternal IQ, household size, stressful life events, depressed affect, mother-infant interaction. Both definitions will be used within this study, however the author will note the

specific criteria (reading competencies or demographics) used to determine the label of at-risk.

Instructional decisions. Instructional decisions will include the determination of methodologies, strategies, materials, format, and timing selected to provide instruction.

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the ability to discern the sounds or phonemes in language. It is strictly an auditory activity, unlike phonics, which includes the association of the phoneme and its accompanying grapheme (Snow, et al., 1998).

Literacy. Snow, et al. (1998) characterize literacy as "broader and more specific than reading (… and include activities sharing) the use of the products and principles of the writing system to get at the meaning of a written text" (p.42). Within this study the terms reading and literacy will be used interchangeably to encompass a full range of behaviors associated with communicating via language.

Design of the Study

The researcher secured permission to observe and interview teachers in two low SES, high CLD elementary schools in an urban setting. Arrangements were made to observe and interview two kindergarten and two first grade teachers at each site. Observations began in March, and concluded the last day of April 2003. Observations focused upon the teachers' behaviors and interactions during reading and language arts instruction. Formal and informal interviews probed

teachers' reasons for specific instructional decisions. Teachers completed a brief demographic survey and drew a descriptive self-portrait. Finally, a review of students' assessment outcomes, including the DRA, occurred where consent was given.

Data analysis was conducted using methods promulgated by Miles and Huberman (1984), as well as Coffey and Atkinson (1996). The qualitative software program N6 was used during data organization, coding, and analyses. Peer review addressed issues of trustworthiness. Multiple data sources provided triangulation.

Teachers were observed in their classrooms, followed by debriefing sessions. Each teacher provided demographic information through a short questionnaire and picture representing herself as an individual. In addition, teachers participated in two interviews. Students' records were reviewed to provide concrete information regarding academic achievement. Finally, school principals and reading specialists were interviewed to establish greater depth of understanding about school climate and expectations. A detailed discussion of the participants and settings is later in the chapter.

Scope of the Study

The study focused upon teachers' explanations for instructional decisions while teaching literacy to children who may be considered at risk for reading difficulties. Based upon SES or CLD status, nearly all of the students in the

selected schools were identified as at-risk for reading difficulties. Teachers' interactions with and selection of strategies for students within this particular context were of greatest interest.

Research Question

The inquiry addressed explanations of literacy instruction decision-making by kindergarten and first grade teachers in diverse schools.

Significance of the Research

Unlike much of the prior research that focused upon isolated factors for literacy acquisition, or general characteristics of effective schools and effective teachers for CLD students, this study focused specifically upon teachers' decision making for literacy instruction, notably within the context of schools serving mostly low SES, CLD students. Although much recent research addressed phonological awareness and reading, little addressed skills such as phonological awareness in a broader literacy context that promoted educational attainment and prevented the occurrence of problems learning to read (Solity, et al., 1999). Even more glaring was the absence of research into literacy with respect to CLD populations (Meacham, 2001).

Additionally, expense and time has been invested in developing assessments of students' reading abilities (e.g., the TPRI and DRA). Local laws mandate administration of such, yet teachers' use of the data to inform instruction

remains unclear. One source confirmed that teachers' administration and use of the instruments was unmonitored in most schools.

However, teachers constantly decide issues related to instructional content and delivery; goals of teacher development include facilitating decision-making that promotes effective teaching and learning. To increase the effectiveness and meaningfulness of professional development, "teachers' existential meanings, … [their] subjective beliefs, attitudes, and emotions" must be identified (van den Berg, 2002). Through exploration of those affective and cognitive domains emerges understanding of the factors that influence teachers' decision making for literacy instruction. Such knowledge and insight enhances the abilities of teacher preparation and professional development programs to refine their programs to promote strategies for more effective instructional delivery to students.

The remaining chapters present relevant literature, the study's design and methods, results, and lastly discussion. The appendices include interview protocols, and teachers' descriptive self-portraits.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The present study focused upon in kindergarten and first grade classrooms teachers' explanations of decision-making for literacy instruction in schools populated by a majority of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) households. Framed by literature on literacy and diversity, as well as teacher behaviors, the study investigated factors that influence teacher decision making for literacy instruction within CLD, low SES classrooms. The review includes literacy acquisition, diversity and reading instruction, and finally, teachers' behaviors.

Literacy Acquisition

Literacy encompasses decoding and encoding text (Snow, et al., 1998). Willis and Harris (2000) augment the task-based definition of literacy with affective components - the engagement with and pleasure from text - as the ultimate goals of literacy instruction. Generally, standardized assessments focus only on the more narrowly defined, textually bound concept of literacy – the mechanics of reading and writing (Meacham, 2001).

Historically, schooling in the United States promoted minimal literacy and attempted to instill morality (Kaestle, 1983). As social and economic structures changed, so too did the competencies associated with literacy (Smith, 1986). Basic skills literacy – such as rote memorization and copying (Langer,

1991) – is inadequate within the increasingly technological and information-based society of today. Instead, a thoughtful literacy is necessary – where critical thinking and problem solving are expected outcomes (Allington, 2001).

This context of heightened expectations magnifies the role and importance of early literacy acquisition. Students who successfully master reading and writing engage in more extended, in-depth reading and writing, thus further enhancing their mastery (Stanovich, 1986). Consequently, early effective literacy instruction can facilitate long-term academic success, and preclude reading difficulties (Allington, 1991). Concomitantly, early identification of children who may be at risk for reading difficulties provides an opportunity to intervene with strategic teaching to possibly ameliorate potential failure (Chard, et al., 1998a, 1998b).

Effective early childhood programs support emergent literacy through language-rich environments that incorporate meaningful, authentic play-based activities (Hanline, 2001). Academic programs that promote student achievement include strategic integration of explicit instruction in basic literacy skills (Chard, et al., 1998) and high quality reading and writing experiences (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998; Allington, 2001).

Notably, many students experience difficulties learning to read (Allington, 1991). Although demographic characteristics such as socio-economic status, and cultural and linguistic diversity have been used to identify students as at-risk for

poor cognitive and language outcomes (Hooper, et al., 1998), failure to acquire literacy skills occurs across all demographic groups (Allington, 1991). Efforts to determine accurate indicators of students who are at risk for reading difficulties, independent of demographic characteristics, have generated numerous studies of mechanical competencies of reading as discussed below.

Early identification of readers at-risk

Several student competency-based predictors of successful reading acquisition emerge from the literature, including phonological awareness (Snow, et al., 1998; Fletcher, et al., 1994; Torgeson, et al., 1994), word recognition (Chard, et al., 1998a, 1998b), and fluency (Samuels, 1979/1997). Formal and informal instrumentation exists to assess such predictors. The following discusses predictors of reading acquisition, and some instruments for evaluating relevant competencies.

Phonological awareness requires recognition that "sounds of speech [are…] distinct from their meaning [… while phonemic awareness] includes understanding that words can be divided into a sequence of phonemes" (Snow, et al., 1998, p. 51). The ability to detect and manipulate sounds, for example rhyming, corresponds with subsequent ability to read – those who can do so more readily learn to read more quickly than those who can not (Wagner, Torgeson, & Rashotte, 1994; Badian, 1998; Lonigan, et al., 1998). Additionally, training in

phonological awareness that includes segmenting and blending phonemes positively effects decoding of phonetically regular words.

Word recognition requires association of the "printed representation of a word with its meaning" (Chard, et al., 1998, p. 141). Extracting convergent and divergent responses from a review of 15 secondary sources and 12 primary studies considering the role of word recognition in reading, Chard, et al., identified four foci. The areas of convergence included: dependence of comprehension upon accurate word reading, prerequisites include phonological awareness and understanding of the functions of print, facilitation through alphabetic understanding, and phonological recoding in tandem with word frequency influences efficacy of word recognition. Successful reading demands integration of those components; some students, especially many diverse students, require "systematic, carefully monitored, and planfully sequenced instruction" (Chard, et al., p.161).

Focusing primarily upon speed, but also considering accuracy of word recognition, fluent reading increases reading comprehension (Samuels, 1979/1997). Repeated reading of a discrete passage (50-200 words) and charting of words read per minute facilitates gains in reading skills. As students improve their fluency and reach automaticity, where attention shifts from decoding of print to attending to texts' meaning, their overall reading comprehension similarly improves (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1992; Rashotte & Torgeson, 1988).

Instruments to identify accurately students at risk for reading difficulties have been developed also. For example, Lombardino et al. (1999) developed the Early Reading Screening Instrument (ERSI) for use by speech-language pathologists and educators. In their study, Lombardino and her fellow investigators administered the ERSI to 149 end-of-the-year kindergarteners. The test includes four subtests: alphabet knowledge, concept of work, invented spelling, and word recognition. Researchers found that total ERSI scores strongly correlated with reading skills in first grade, of which reading comprehension was most strongly predicted. They also determined that an abbreviated form provided equally accurate information (Lombardino, et al., 1999).

Locally, the Texas Education Agency developed an instrument to assess kindergarten, first- and second-grade students; the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) provides screening and inventory sections to promote targeted instruction (TPRI Revised 2000-2001 Trainer's Manual, p.2). Like the ERSI, it includes sub-sections addressing specific areas such as graphophonemic knowledge, phonemic awareness, and word reading. Unlike the ERSI, which targets only kindergarten age children, the TPRI extends coverage, thus addressing concepts of print, reading accuracy, reading fluency, reading accuracy, listening and reading comprehension (TPRI Teacher's Guide, Revised 2001-2002). For the emergent reader, the bulk of the assessment focuses upon discrete letters, sounds, and words.

Proponents aver that the TPRI provides classroom teachers with accessible data to inform their decisions for student instruction and intervention. However, informal discussions with classroom teachers suggest that some teachers perceive it as another time-consuming administratively imposed assessment, and the information often remains untapped (Davis, K., Roberts, D., personal communication, July 29, 2002). The need for accurate data regarding students' learning remains a concern during selection and employment of instructional strategies.

Instructional approaches

Common threads appear throughout the literature regarding characteristics of effective literacy instruction. Instruction must be meaningful and well considered (Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998, Allington, 2001, Hanline, 2001). Activities should incorporate multiple goals, dense with content as well as process (Allington, 2001; Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998). Finally, extensive blocks of time for engagement are necessary to facilitate an intensity and breadth of learning (Allington, 2001; Hanline, 2001). Strategies that reflect such characteristics include play-based instruction and explicit instruction.

Play-based instruction. Thoughtful, play-based instruction provides a critical opportunity to nurture and support emergent literacy acquisition (Hanline, 2001). Hanline (2001) summarizes four characteristics of supportive early literacy: plentiful exposure to and interaction with printed materials including

books, notes, cards, labels, signs, and charts; ongoing integration of writing opportunities across settings and activities; ample opportunities to develop vocabulary and oral language through interactions with peers and more knowledgeable others; and promotion of auditory processing and phonological awareness skills. Incorporation of these characteristics into play activities such as block building provides meaningful experiential learning opportunities for young children (Hanline, 2001).

Explicit instruction. Direct, explicit instruction of basic reading and decoding skills promotes academic achievement (Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998). Using classroom observations and in-depth interviews of nine first-grade teachers, Wharton-McDonald and her colleagues (1998) identified teacher practices and beliefs that differentiated teachers whose students demonstrated the highest levels of achievement. Among the constellation of distinguishing characteristics was "coherent and thorough integration of skills with high-quality reading and writing experiences" (Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998, p.101).

Similarly, Chard, et al. (1998a,1998b) advocated explicit instruction to promote successful reading acquisition by less-skilled readers. Their review and subsequent study of word recognition and reading success elaborated upon the complexity of reading, noting that some students require systematic, intensive instruction to achieve independence; failure to provide such may preclude success for unskilled readers. Chard and colleagues (1998a) stated "if we provide

[unskilled] learners with the tools and strategies for achieving automatic and fluent word recognition, we increase their chances for successful reading experiences" (p. 161).

Considerations regarding research. Research of literacy with respect to diversity receives limited recognition. In a review of the literature regarding literacy and diversity, Meacham (2001) asserted, "in the realm of mainstream literacy politics and policy, cultural diversity is seen as marginal, and even detrimental, to effective literacy conception and practice" (Meacham, 2001, p. 181). Snow, et al. (1998) asseverated in the introduction to Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children promulgated by the National Research Council,

> A full picture of literacy from a cultural and historical perspective would require an analysis of the distribution of literacy skills, values, and uses across classes and genders as well as religious and social groups: it would require a discussion of the connections between professional, religious, and leisure practices. Such a discussion would go far beyond the scope of this report, which focuses on reading and reading difficulties as defined by mainstream opinions in the United States, in particular by U.S. educational institutions at the end of the twentieth century. In that context, employability, citizenship and participation in the culture require high levels of literacy achievement. (p.34)

The authors maintain that they abstain from addressing issues of culture, yet admit employment of standards "defined by mainstream opinions" (Snow, et al., 1998, p. 34) without acknowledgement of the assumptions underlying that singular, monolithic norm. Claiming to remove literacy from its cultural contexts, they appear blind to possible distortions by their mainstream cultural lenses. Meacham (2001) renounced the validity of such "policy statements (which) claim that great strides have been achieved in our understanding of literacy learning without acknowledging factors associated with cultural and linguistic diversity factors" (Meacham, 2001, p. 182).

Literacy research and discussions that focus solely upon components of linguistics and psychology exclude critical contexts, and thus fail to address learning accurately. Meaningful understandings of literacy require recognition of processes and contexts relevant to "culture, history, family, and other cultural institutions" (Willis & Harris, 2000, p. 76). Comprehension of literacy learning requires inclusive definitions of its components, processes, and contexts. In a society of increasing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, public education must actively promote effective, respectful instructional philosophies and strategies. Schools incorporating "multiply constituted and culturally inclusive literacy alternatives" (Meacham, 2001, p. 183) will advocate for and affirm effective literacy practices.

Considering Diversity

Demographics.

During the 2000-2001 school year, 61.2% of the nation's student population was white. Black students comprised about 17.2% and Hispanic students 16.3% of the nation's student body. Asian/Pacific Islanders made up 4.1% and American Indian/Alaska Native students accounted for 1.2% of elementary and secondary public school populations. However, six states diverged from that pattern; the majority populations were students of color in California, Hawaii, Louisianan, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Texas (NCES, 2002). Additionally, growing numbers of students reside in low SES households, as well as in households where the dominant language is not English (NCES, n.d.). These variables differ from the majority of teachers, who are often white, middle class, and English-dominant (Broughman & Roeflson, 2001). Scholars suggest that disparate educational outcomes between groups may be attributed, or at least exacerbated, by the differences of culture between many students and their teachers, differences that could be ameliorated by culturally responsive teaching (Day-Vines, 2000; Gay, 2000).

Equity in education.

Equity, as characterized by access to effective schooling and attainment in educational outcomes, has eluded CLD students for decades (Harry & Anderson, 1999). Moreover, some researchers argue that

current education policy and practice reproduce an inequitable, meritocratic system, as demonstrated by disparities in educational achievement and attainment (Willis & Harris, 2000). Concurrently, scholars hasten to identify crucial elements of effective literacy instruction (Allington, 2001; Block, et al., 2002), as well as culturally responsive instruction (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2001; Gay, 2000). Acknowledging that inequities beyond the classroom may influence student success, investigators continue to search for means to improve educational outcomes. Still, research about literacy and diversity seldom overlap (Meacham, 2001).

Historical contexts. Historically, education and literacy instruction primarily served to prepare a well-equipped work force (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) and assimilate waves of immigrants in the United States (Spindler, 2000; Kaestle, 1983). The power of literacy has long been recognized in the United States.

Early America reserved formal education for select few; for decades, only white, Anglo-Saxon protestant, affluent males were considered worthy of such (Kaestle, 1983). In defiance of state laws, secretive schooling provided literacy training to those held as slaves in the south before the Civil War; slaveholders feared the consequences of an educated slave (Kaestle, 1983). Frederick Douglass considered literacy "the pathway from slavery to freedom" (Kaestle, 1983, p.196); slaves who could read were among the most likely to run away from their imprisonment. Similarly precluded from formal education by social dictates, girls

and women of all backgrounds were generally dissuaded from pursuing education and literacy beyond the most rudimentary skills. During the late 1700s and early 1800s, education of girls and women increased as arguments regarding their capacity for learning, and their critical roles as mothers, garnered greater acceptance (Kaestle, 1983).

The early and mid 1800s marked increased immigration from Europe, including many people who neither spoke English nor worshipped in a Protestant church. Divisiveness existed between American–born Protestants and these new immigrants; however within both groups was some acceptance of schooling as a means to obviate those difficulties. "Thus education for assimilation became one of the central preoccupations of nineteenth century school officials" (Kaestle, 1983, p.72).

As in the past, politics and policy continue to enwrap literacy education (Willis & Harris, 2000). Meacham (2001) noted that "efforts to codify and implement strong text conceptions of literacy in schools predictably occur at moments when culture, class, and gender diversity are perceived as gaining in social influence" (Meacham, 2001, p. 181). The current changes in American society – demographic as well as social – provide such a context for codification and narrowly defined conceptions of literacy. Again, education faces a changing population. Although some continue to prefer an educational system that

assimilates students into a singular culture, other scholars urge employment of more culturally responsive teaching (House, Emmer, & Lawrence, 1991).

Current Scholarship

Unlike historical research regarding diverse populations that operated from a deficit model (see Valencia, 1997 and Menchaca, 1997 for in-depth description of the deficit model), current scholarship promotes concepts and practices that honor diversity through relevant pedagogy and high expectations. Culturally responsive pedagogy incorporates components of self-knowledge, knowledge of culture in many configurations, advocacy, and caring into an approach that expects and enables successful learning and teaching in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2001; Gay, 2000). Effective schools for CLD students share many themes with culturally responsive pedagogy, while considering the larger learning community of the school (Scribner, 1999; Scheurich, 1998; Scribner & Reyes, 1999). As advocated by Freire (1970/2000), literature of culturally responsive pedagogy and effective schools acknowledges and optimizes the historical and social context in which learning occurs.

Freire's concept of education. Freire distinguished between those who taught through banking knowledge, and those who promoted active problem-solving as an approach to learning and teaching. He argued that teachers who deposited information into passively waiting students banked knowledge. Conversely, Freire applauded teachers who engaged in a dialogic, problem-

solving practice predicated upon an active exchange between teachers and students, rooted in the students' world.

Educators who adopt Freire's (1970/2000) problem-solving (versus banking) concept of education exhibit several distinguishing characteristics. Problems-solving teachers recognize dialogue's indispensable role in cognition and learning. Teachers and students engage in critical thought and analyses of education and their world, reflecting upon and acting within that context. Critical educators, they ground learning in a "dynamic present" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 84), which acknowledges and builds upon students' historical and social contexts. Ladson-Billings (1995) specifically notes that culturally competent teachers utilize Freirian concepts; they are problem-solving educators.

Cultural responsiveness. Culturally responsive teaching honors students' knowledge and utilizes it to develop new knowledge and understandings (Gay, 2000). Specifically, Gay (2000) defines it

> as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. (p. 29) [emphasis in original]

Like Freire, she grounds teaching in a dynamic present that honors and promotes the students' world. Gay (2000) explains that culturally responsive teaching is

comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative and emancipatory, a praxis for teachers.

Beginning with eight teachers in a predominantly African-American, low SES elementary school district, who were identified as outstanding through community nomination, Ladson-Billings (1995) explored the characteristics that they shared as outstanding teachers in that community. The teachers were all female, five African American, three White. Data included interviews, observations, videotapes of their instruction, and group discussion of those (Ladson-Billings, 1995). She identifies three convergent themes to define culturally competent teachers. They distinguish themselves through (1) their conceptions of themselves and others, (2) the manner in which they structure social relations, and (3) their conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.478). Culturally competent teachers live their beliefs; they consistently act upon their respect for students, their communities, their knowledge, and their abilities.

Effective schools for CLD students. The next level of cultural responsiveness exists beyond the classroom and into the school. Studies of high-performing, predominantly CLD, low SES schools yield themes consistent with culturally responsive education: learning communities where students and their worlds are respected, where academic success is expected, nurtured, and promoted, where dynamic problem-solving perpetuates success (Scribner & Reyes, 1999; Scheurich, 1998).

Scribner and Reyes (1999) promulgate a conceptual framework to create learning communities of high performing Hispanic students. Based upon their studies of high-performing schools, it includes four over-arching categories requisite to students' success: knowledge required, responsive school culture, disciplines of learning organization, and action dimensions (Scribner & Reyes, 1999, p. 191). They delineate four action dimensions: the first addresses the larger community, the second leadership and collaborative governance, the third culturally responsive pedagogy, and the fourth advocacy oriented assessment (Scribner & Reyes, 1999, p. 192). Each component represents practices present in high-performing Hispanic schools.

Scheurich's (1998) study of successful elementary schools for students of color yields some similar findings to Scribner and Reyes' work. The High Performance All Student Success Schools (HiPass) model predicated upon data from pre-K to fifth grade schools, explicates core beliefs and cultural characteristics. The larger community plays an important part in the success; schools exist for the communities, a strong sense of family exists within the school, thus highlighting each person's responsibility for success. Leadership within the schools appears caring and critical, promoting an environment that nurtured innovation, collaboration and problem-solving. Cultural responsiveness manifests through respectful, learner-centered interactions in which CLD characteristics were valued. Finally, advocacy oriented assessment parallels

schools aggressive use of standardized tests to prove their success. Importantly, the role of deep caring, of love, permeates each belief and characteristic (Scheurich, 1998).

Arguably, caring in education appears most clearly through interactions and expectations between students and teachers. Gay asserts, "Students feel a need to have a personal connection with teachers … when teachers legitimize their voice and visibility" (2000, p. 49) [emphasis in original]. Throughout the scholarship explicated above, caring and respect inhabit every aspect.

Teacher Behaviors

Teachers' beliefs guide their classroom behavior (Stern & Shavelson, 1983). Instructional behavior responds to teachers' theoretical beliefs; however, consistency of such varies (Fang, 1996). Van den Berg (2002) argues that how teachers make meaning of their world, their existential meanings, exercises great influence over their responsiveness to teaching demands. Consistent with Bandura's social learning theory (1977), van den Berg (2002) stresses the influence of social-cognitive factors in teachers' actions. Social learning theory acknowledges the interplay of personal and environmental factors in decisions (Bandura, 1977), thus it can provide a theoretical framework within which to analyze teachers' beliefs and practices. The following discussion reviews

pertinent themes from social learning theory, as well as research into teachers' cognitions and actions.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory (SLT) steps away from the psychological traditions of behaviorism, which provide mechanistic explanations of behaviors, and incorporates social context into understandings of human behavior (Bandura, 1977). A comprehensive theory, SLT views interactions as a function of behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors, which operate inextricably upon each other. Functioning results from an elaborate orchestration of individual and environmental variables subjected to regulation by the individual and factors beyond the individual (Bandura, 1977). Cognition possesses a critical role in SLT for "humans do not simply respond to stimuli, they interpret them" (Bandura, 1977, p. 59).

Recognizing the complexity of behavior, the interaction of experience and physiological influences, Bandura argued that crucial elements of SLT address both. In his treatise Social Learning Theory (1977), Bandura explicated the roles of antecedent determinants, consequent determinants, cognitive control, and reciprocal determinism. He urged analysis of behavior processes' determinants, suggesting that learning occurs by response consequences that serve multiple purposes.

In social learning theory, response consequences perform three different functions: to inform, to motivate, and to reinforce. The informative function apprises the individual of outcomes and their accompanying effects. Awareness of consequences promotes the ability to exact change predicated upon specific behaviors, however awareness alone will not alter behaviors unilaterally; individuals' beliefs with respect to those behaviors and anticipated outcomes affect behaviors. The motivational function enables conversion of future consequences into present motivators through symbolic representation of foreseeable outcomes. Reinforcement functions include awareness to inform and motivate individuals, thus regulating learned behaviors (Bandura, 1977).

Asserting that most humans learn behavior through observation, Bandura (1977) conceptualizes four processes that govern observational learning:

> attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Multiple factors – individual and external to the individual – act upon each of the component processes of observational learning. Consequently, he argues, "the provision of models, even prominent ones, will not automatically create similar behavior in others" (Bandura, 1977, p.29).

These components of Social Learning Theory are congruent with some of the findings about teachers' beliefs and practices. Notably, teachers' practices result from a complex interplay of "personal and environmental determinants

[…monitored constantly by…] self-generated and external sources of influence (Bandura, 1977, pp. 11-13).

Teachers' Cognitions and Actions

Teachers' cognitions shape their actions - the instruction that they provide (Lavende, 1988; Mastrini-McAteer, 1997). Lavende (1988) investigated teachers' theoretical orientation of reading instruction through use of the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (DeFord, 1985, cited by Lavende, 1988), a class observation rubric, and teacher interviews. He reported that teachers with skills and phonics orientations identified classroom experience as most influential on their beliefs and practices, while teachers with whole language orientations identified professional development as most influential (Lavende, 1988).

In a study of third grade teachers' reading instruction, Mastrini-McAteer investigated the congruence of teachers' beliefs and instructional practices, in light of their theoretical orientation to reading instruction – phonics -, skills-, or whole language-based. Eighteen teachers from several different schools participated in the study. Data collected included teachers' responses to the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (DeFord, 1985, as cited in Mastrini-McAteer, 1997), three classroom observations, teacher interviews, and review of student achievement records. Mastrini-McAteer found that a small percentage of teachers (28 %) taught in a manner congruent with their stated beliefs; such inconsistency agrees with observations by Fang (1996). Concurrently, she noted

that student achievement was statistically greater in those classes where teachers' instruction was congruent with their beliefs. Other findings included different influences upon beliefs and practices. Teachers most frequently reported that classroom experience was the major influence on beliefs, but they cited teachers' instructional manuals as most influential on practice (Mastrini-McAteer, 1997). Additionally, the socio-economic status of the students did not appear to significantly influence teachers' beliefs or practices.

The preceding literature review addressed components relevant to the present research study: literacy acquisition, diversity and reading instruction, and finally, teachers' behaviors.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Educational inequities have long plagued the public schools in the United States (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Varied access to effective, culturally responsive instruction may contribute to the recurring phenomenon of differentiated educational outcomes across demographic groups (Patton, 1998; Campbell-Whatley & Comer, 2000). Although much early schooling focuses upon reading instruction, factors that influence teachers' decisions for specific reading instruction remain largely unexplored in the context of schools that mostly serve students of color in poverty (Meacham, 2001). The purpose of this study was to investigate the explanations of decision making for literacy instruction given by kindergarten and first grade teachers in high poverty schools populated by culturally and linguistically (CLD) students. Understanding these factors provides teacher trainers and professional development staff with insights to craft programming that facilitates teachers' use of effective, culturally responsive literacy instruction.

The following research question guided the proposed study: How do kindergarten and first grade teachers in schools serving large populations of poor, culturally and linguistically diverse students explain their decision-making for literacy instruction?

Research Design

This interpretive case study used ethnographic methods. A qualitative - interpretive research approach provided opportunity to delve into teachers' thinking processes (van den Berg, 2001), facilitating understanding of how teachers construct meaning, "how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the (it)" (Merriam 1998, p.6). Interpretive case study employs:

> rich, thick description ... to develop conceptual categories or to illustrate, support, or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to the data gathering. … A case study researcher gathers as much information about the problem as possible with the intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon. …The investigator might take all the data and develop a typology, a continuum, or categories that conceptualize different approaches to the task. (Merriam, 1998, pp. 38-39)

Case study requires a more complex design and diffuse degree of interaction than in-depth interviews alone as data sources vary (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Within the present study, data sources included two in-depth interviews with teachers, a demographic survey and descriptive self-portrait, interviews with the school principals and reading specialists, weekly classroom observations, followed by debriefing conversations, and review of samples of students' records. The layers of data gathered facilitated conceptualization of teachers' approaches

to decision-making for literacy instruction, especially in the context of a high poverty school serving large percentages of CLD students, and assured triangulation of data through varied sources. Although researchers have explored best practices for reading instruction and culturally responsive instruction, the interplay of the two domains remained generally uncharted heretofore.

Theoretical Approach to Research

Several beliefs about research underpin the study. Different conceptualizations of ontology, epistemology, and axiology distinguish various research paradigms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The axioms of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), upon which qualitative interpretive study rests, follow.

Axiom 1: The nature of reality, ontology, is multiple and holistic. Numerous ever-changing factors construct idiosyncratic reality perceptions; no single, correct perception of reality exists. Individuals live many roles, within their home, work, and community environments. Concurrently, a lifetime of professional and personal experiences coalesce with varied roles to shape realities. Teachers' unique histories and perspectives inform their decision-making; the demographic survey, descriptive self-portrait, and interviews provided opportunity to understand and reflect upon those (van den Berg, 2001).

Axiom 2: The relationship of the knower and the known, epistemology, is interdependent and fluid. Teachers and students continuously interact in overt and

subtle ways. Classroom observations provide occasions to note interactions between teachers and students, as well as those with a participant observer. A classroom teacher for 17 years, this researcher was compelled to delineate her former and present roles within the classroom setting, maintain focus on the research questions, and refrain from assuming past roles of teacher, collaborator, supervisor, or mentor.

Axiom 3: The purpose of inquiry is development of idiographic knowledge, "working hypotheses." The knowledge shared reflects the unique perspectives of participants, as interpreted by the researcher. Thus, the knowledge is particularistic, grounded in a specific context. The findings in this study are specific to particular cases; however, insights gained may promote understanding in a larger context.

Axiom 4: Fluidity of existence precludes isolation of causes and effects. The inter-relatedness of entities generates a "mutual simultaneous shaping" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.38). The "dynamic sociocultural nature of school processes" requires use of a cultural–individual perspective (van den Berg, 2001, p.613 citing Geijsel, 2001). Consequently, individual cause and effect relationships defy determination. Within education, a single remedy for disparate achievement does not exist, though understanding of influences upon instruction

may facilitate interventions at the teacher level to alter situations that impinge equitable education.

Axiom 5: Axiology, the values of inquiry, is value-laden. Researchers carry conscious and unconscious biases and beliefs that affect design, development, relationships within and processes of an investigation. This researcher was required to discriminate personal, experience-based constructs of effective instruction from published, research-based constructs of effective instruction. Additionally, passionate opinions about equity, and teachers' competence required punctilious monitoring to preclude overshadowing the data obtained, or actively influencing teachers.

Other beliefs also shaped the study design: (a) qualitative research promotes understanding of context and environment in which decisions occur (Erickson, 1986), and (b) individual's narratives provide meaningful, valuable data (Polkinghorne, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 1991).

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling procedures were used to identify potential participants; Merriam (1998) noted that such requires selection criteria. Within this project, sample selection criteria included school demographic information (high poverty, large percentages of students of color, acceptable or higher performance ratings from the Texas Education Agency [TEA]) and availability of monolingual English kindergarten and first grade classes. Local district

procedures provided initial contact with principals to solicit their participation. From a list of sites where principals were willing to host the study, selected schools were chosen based upon their demographic composition and local Texas Education Agency (TEA) ratings. The discussion below includes an overview of school and teacher characteristics. All names herein – of schools, teachers, and students – are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. Distinguishing details have been omitted when their inclusion could compromise participant's privacy.

Both schools were located in the same geographical service area within the school district. Populated mostly by CLD students and students from households identified as low SES, Hope and Walker Elementary Schools served as the study's host sites. During the 2001-2002 school year, Hope Elementary enrolled 604 students, Walker 621 students. Each school had three monolingual English kindergarten classes, and three monolingual English first grade classes. Of the third graders, 81% of Hope students and 91% of Walker students qualified as economically disadvantaged.. Culturally and linguistically diverse students composed 97% of the population at Walker, 94% at Hope. However, the ethnic/racial breakdown within schools differed. Walker served about 52% African American, 45% Hispanic, and 3% white students. Hope served approximately 37% African American, 56% Hispanic, and 2% Asian, and 5% white students (TEA, 2002).

According to the 2002 Texas Education Agency (TEA)'s accountability ratings, Hope was exemplary and Walker was acceptable. Base indicators for the ratings included Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) scores and annual dropout rates. Acknowledgement indicators, used to distinguish exemplary, recognized, acceptable, and low performing schools relevant to elementary campuses included attendance, comparable improvement in reading, and comparable improvement in math (TEA, 2002 Accountability Data, Manual).

Campus leadership provided another similarity between the schools. Both campus principals were in their first year, replacing experienced principals with four or more years of tenure on that particular campus. Atypical of traditional K-12 administrators, the new principals were relatively young (i.e., under 43 years of age), bilingual and Latina.

In both schools, many classes were bilingual, therefore the pool of available participants was reduced to twelve. Principals subsequently recruited teachers to join in the study based upon the following criteria: at least 3 years of teaching experience, teaching a monolingual English class, willing to participate. All of the teachers previously participated in grade level, reading academies (workshops), and some form of training in balanced literacy. Data for the following snapshots were obtained through observation, individual demographic surveys, descriptive self-portraits, and interviews. (See Appendix A for table of teachers' demographic data; Appendix C for teachers' descriptive self-protraits.)

Snapshots from Hope Elementary School

The teachers at Hope Elementary School enjoyed a relatively new facility located between residential and commercial neighborhoods. They benefited from the amenities that accompany newer facilities with respect to space and equipment. Built in 1998, Hope relieved some of the overcrowding that plagued nearby schools. Classrooms appeared comfortably appointed with adequate workspace, lighting, and materials. The school had two very distinct wings and a few portable buildings. At the time of the study, classes were grouped by language: bilingual classes in one wing of the building, monolingual classes in the other. Observed classes were located in opposite ends of an extended hallway. Dora Dunn and Meg Marshall taught kindergarten. Cara Clay and Oma Orton taught first grade.

Dora's kindergarten class was immediately adjacent to Cara's first grade class. At the far end of the hall, Meg's kindergarten class was two rooms away from Oma's first grade class. The classes were not observed interacting, except during recess, regardless of room location or grade. Teachers were observed talking with colleagues during recess. They reported attending grade-level team meetings throughout the semester.

Kindergarten teachers. Twenty-nine years old, Meg was the youngest of all the participating teachers at Hope Elementary. Certified in elementary education, early childhood, and English as a Second Language (ESL), she was

+completing her fourth year in the classroom. Meg came to teaching through an alternative certification program in a large, urban area in the Midwest.

Although she noted some training in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, she reported no training in areas of disability. Meg described recent participation in many professional development workshops for literacy, reading, and writing, which the local school district offered. During debriefings and interviews, Meg recalled information from those workshops, identifying strategies and activities that she learned therein and incorporated into her daily instruction.

In her descriptive picture, Meg sketched herself in the center of the paper standing, facing the viewer, eyes wide-opened and detailed, smiling, and as a stick figure. Arrows pointed to text away from the body. All writing was lower case, however in the transcription that follows, upper case letters and periods were added to better distinguish items.

> Likes to kiyak [sic]. Can spell. Can't afford to teach much longer. Likes music. Worries too much. Thinks a lot. 29. Teacher. Happy. Loves kids and teaching. Can't draw. Likes to arm wrestle. Not married; no kids. Loves to travel. Likes to dance (salsa especially).

In addition, although Meg's figure included hands, her feet were absent. When asked to describe her memories of her family's SES when she was a child, Meg recalled,

> We were poor. In [large urban area], I don't think we were on food stamps, but we had cars that were breaking down all the time and once there was [sic] lots of medical bills. We didn't ever starve or anything like that, but we were poor - not on welfare poor, but I don't know what you would call that.

On the demographic survey, Meg identified her racial/ethnic group as White. When asked about her professional affiliations, she replied that she had none.

Dora Dunn, the other kindergarten teacher at Hope Elementary drew a figure facing forward and smiling, similar to Meg. However, a circle-shaped head, triangle-shaped body, and lines for appendages represented Dora in her descriptive picture. Eyes were simply small circles. An arrow moving from the head pointed to a box in which she wrote, "I meant to draw a big smile – not a big nose." Additionally, Dora recorded, "I have lots of fun with my class and laugh a lot. I know I am fortunate to have a job that makes [sic] allows me to have fun and be challenged." Neither hands nor feet were present on Dora's drawing. Self-identified as Anglo, Dora described her childhood SES as transitioning from struggling when her father was in graduate school to middle class once he established his law practice.

During debriefings, Dora recounted points about emergent literacy learned during professional development activities, noting the influence of the training on her expectations for students' learning, as well as the strategies and activities she

utilized. Yet, she asserted that her underlying beliefs have remained largely unchanged. For example, Dora stated. “Just because they push for more literacy in kindergarten, and pre-k too, and just kinda [sic] seeing that it really does --- it can be done, and it's not going to um, change my philosophy of teaching drastically.”

Dora was also certified to teach elementary and early childhood. However, unlike Meg, she followed a more traditional, college- based teacher preparation program. Forty-five years old at the time of the study, Dora had taught for 19 years in the school district. During that time, she spent 13 years in pre-kindergarten, moving up to kindergarten only five years ago.

Dora named college courses as the sole source of her training for teaching students who may be identified as culturally and linguistically diverse. She attributed her training to work with student with disabilities to the district-sponsored Early Learning workshops. Additionally, Dora noted her participation in the Kindergarten Reading Academy, and the local district’s Balanced Literacy program. Dora reported membership in the National Association for Education of Young Children in response to a query about any professional affiliations.

First grade teachers. The first grade teachers’ years of teaching experience diverged somewhat similarly – Oma Orton had taught only five years; however, Cara Clay had accumulated forty-one years of experience. However, both teachers were older than their kindergarten colleagues. Oma was 48; Cara was old enough to retire, be rehired, and to decline to state the year in which she was born.

Oma's teaching experience included a year in a public school and two years in a private school in the Deep South, followed by two years in Hope. Married to a member of the armed forces, Oma moved frequently. Although noting only course-based training for teaching students with racial and ethnic differences, Oma shared anecdotes about how she, as a middle class white woman, addressed issues of race, including consulting with her husband because of his experience working with large populations of color. When asked about her childhood SES, Oma replied middle class.

Oma earned a Bachelors degree in Elementary Education, and Masters in Elementary Education with a Reading Specialty. She spoke fondly of her graduate school experiences and frequently referred to her studies when discussing the reasons for her instructional decisions. Oma exclaimed, "I mean, I have just had wonderful professors throughout my academic career that have just taught me so many things about teaching children to read." When asked about her professional affiliations, Oma disclosed that she was a member of the International Reading Association.

Across the bottom of her drawing, Oma wrote "Peacekeeper – Adventurer." She included three scenes. One scene featured her smiling profile with the top of her head open and books labeled "John Grisham, Dean Koontz, Stephen King" floating above it; all superimposed on a bookcase full of books. Also, on the top shelf of the bookcase is a framed picture, on the middle shelf a

vessel labeled “Garden,” and on the bottom shelf a cat. In another scene, Oma drew a teacher at a board upon which “Reading is Comprehension” is written; a cat looks onto the scene. The largest picture included a pond in which a fish was caught on a fishing line held by an unmanned pole. Beside the pole an empty chair and a tent rested. Slightly removed from the campsite was a smiling bicyclist shouting “Yipee! [sic]” while pedaling down the road.

The other first grade teacher from Hope Elementary, Cara, drew a single figure, unlike Oma. Like Meg, Cara drew herself in the center of the paper standing, facing the viewer, eyes wide-opened and detailed, smiling. However, the body was fuller, not a stick person; hands and feet were pictured. Several arrows pointed away from her to text, recorded below. Letter case is that used by Cara; periods were added to distinguish individual items more clearly.

> Attending mtgs [sic] at school and away from the campus. Car pool for granddaughter. Daughter’s Wedding May 3, 2003. Mom in nursing home. Weekly preparation for Learning Centers. Taking granddaughter to speech every Friday in [local suburb]. Lesson Plans weekly. Making sure all kids are successful. Conferencing with parents about student progress.

Additionally, Cara wrote and circled “Too many things to accomplish each day.” When asked to describe to her family’s SES when she was a child, she stated, “We were very poor, but we were educated.” Cara identified herself as African American.

Cara taught first grade for 37 years in the local district, all in what are now considered high needs schools, based upon demographics (i.e., percentage of students of color, and number of students receiving free or reduced lunch.) She joined the Hope faculty the year the school opened. Cara noted some training in ESL to facilitate teaching students with cultural and linguistic differences, as well as training in dyslexia to work with students who have disabilities. She also reported participation in several of the recent district-wide literacy training programs.

Cara reported membership in the international honor society of Phi Delta Kappa, as well as the educators' honor sorority Delta Kappa Gamma. She described service projects related to reading and community outreach that each organization promoted.

Snapshots from Walker Elementary

Walker was a much older school than Hope, built in 1970. Entrance was controlled from within the main office; all exterior doors were locked. Office personnel used visual monitors mounted by the entryway to identify visitors, who were required to buzz for admittance. Inside, the rooms allowed little natural light. Classrooms were small, furnished with a mismatch of seating, desks, and shelves.

Like Hope Elementary, language seemed to determine the location of a classroom. Generally, bilingual classes were situated together; monolingual

classes situated together. Outside, a dozen portables housed classes, including one of the observed first grade classes, the Reading Specialist, and several special education classes. The other observed first grade class was located in an older section of the main building. On the opposite side of the main building, observed kindergarten classes were in adjacent rooms. Hilary Harry and Sue Snow taught kindergarten. Winnie Watson and Nan Noddings taught first grade.

During lunch, kindergarten teachers were observed sharing conversation in the their rooms and the teachers' lounge. The kindergarten classes planned field trips together and shared a common time for outside play. Neither the first grade teachers nor their classes were observed interacting.

Kindergarten teachers. Sue Snow, at 29, was the youngest of the observed teachers from Walker Elementary. A white woman originally from the Midwest, she worked with adult novice readers, and taught English in an east Asian country before certification. The current semester marks Sue's sixth year in elementary schools, where she taught third and fourth grade until last year.

On the Teacher Survey, Sue reported certification in elementary education, endorsements in English and Early Childhood. She listed her college reading methods course as a source for training in reading and literacy. Additionally, Sue recorded participation in district supported training such as Balanced Literacy and the Kindergarten Reading Academy, as well as training in specific reading programs (e.g., Orton-Gillingham). She identified her training to

work with students who have racial/ethnic differences as "three hours in college, TAAS training to teach to A.A. [African American] culture, at least 1-3 in-service days each year." In the areas of economic and community differences, she wrote, "see racial/ethnic differences," in disabilities "at least 1-2 inserv [sic] days each year." Sue's descriptive drawing was inside a box outlined with squiggly lines. Within the box were six small scenes described below, as is the accompanying text.

> [line to the car and plane] I love to travel and see new things. I move alot [sic]! I spent a year in Thailand teaching English!! [arrow from adult and children with blocks] I love to empower children to explore and learn new concepts. When I see a child engaged and discover a concept for the first time and then share that knowledge with others I get very excited and feel fulfilled. [arrow pointing from the outline of the box] a squishy square analytical person. Not to [sic] rigid but am very planned out. [arrows from church and people] church is a large part of my life. My husband is a minister of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. I am the director of our church Pathfinder (boy/girl scout) group. [another arrow from box outline] Squiggly lines show times I venture out of the norm but quickly come back to the planned and organized (somewhat) lifestyle I am comfortable with [sic]. [line from musical instruments – piano, flute, sax] I like to play a variety of musical instruments. [arrow from adult with a book and child]

> I love to read and to teach others to read. [arrow from house, figures labeled "husband, dog, Mom, Steve, Dad, brother, wife, my neice[sic] named after me!"] Family is very [emphasis in original] important to me. Most of my family live faraway.

Sue labeled her paper "My descriptive drawing (writing!!)" and included smiley faces throughout. Later, when asked to recall her family's SES when she was a child, Sue characterized it as middle class.

Hilary Harry, the other kindergarten teacher was working on National Board Certification. Forty-five years old, Hilary had accumulated sixteen years of teaching experience; she reported certification in elementary education. Originally certified in the Deep South, she attended a respected university in the northeast to earn her master's degree in education. Hilary reported 60 hours of training in Balanced Literacy. Regarding training to teach students with differences, under the category of racial/ethnic differences, she noted "I subscribe to Teaching Tolerance [magazine published by the Southern Law Poverty Center]." Hilary wrote, "nothing official; yet supplemental Reading material on concepts [sic]" in response to queries about training in differences predicated language, economic status, community, or disability.

Hilary did not include herself in her descriptive picture. She drew a carrot, some small above ground plants, and a tree. The view included the plants above ground, and their roots below the surface. Hilary's comments were "I think

labeling myself as a ‘gardener’ encompasses my teaching. Although I may not see the ‘harvest,’ I know I’ve planted many seeds!” She also included a comment by the tree roots. “Self-directed learning (It takes a while to master, but the roots are strong and deep.).” Hilary identified her family’s SES as middle class when she was growing up.

> Middle class. We were middle class, upper middle class. Pretty much from I think I can remember from when I was four or five until I was a senior in high school, it was a mobily [sic] upward middle class situation. Yeah. I had a lot. I had everything I wanted, pretty much. It was, I was very fortunate. I had two parents, though they divorced when I was in high school. But I had you know a lot of experiences, travel experiences that a lot of people don't have, so. I was fortunate.

First grade teachers. A 34 year old, white, first grade teacher, Nan Noddings also recalled a middle class childhood.

> Um, I got pretty much, I mean, I didn't' get everything, but I got piano lessons. I mean, you know? I mean yeah, my grandfather went halvsies [sic]. But if they saw some type of need or whatever, I got it. I got the yes and no invisible ink books. I got the skill books, I got - you know. I mean, we weren't rich --- I would say middle class. I mean, I had pretty much, I pretty much had it. You know? I mean, I didn't have a Leap Pad, but they didn't have those.

Nan reported four years of teaching experience. She taught secondary special education for two years before joining the faculty of Walker Elementary. Certified in special education and elementary education, Nan was in her first year of general education. She reluctantly agreed to participate in the study because of her novice status as a teacher in general education, stating, "If you don't do the study here, everybody will know it's because of me. It'll be all my fault." Nan listed participation in several district sponsored literacy and reading in-services. However, in the area of difference, she checked training only in the area of disabilities, noting "Dyslexia, And I'm Sp. Ed. Certified [sic]."

Unlike her colleagues at Walker, Nan included herself in her descriptive picture. She drew herself balancing on one foot upon the far right end of tight rope inside a circus tent. The umbrella in her hand has small drawings labeled "school," "home," and "co-workers." Three cartoon-like thought bubbles surrounded her head. In one bubble, she wrote "perfectionism [space] time to make a folder game." In another, she wrote, "prof. develop. G/T." The third bubble included two students' names followed by question marks, as well as "22? etc." Nan labeled the tightrope "linear." At the far left end of the tight rope, flush against the papers outer edge, she wrote "NO END," below that, under the tight rope, "Zone of safety."

Winnie Watson was the other first grade teacher from Walker Elementary. Fifty-one years old and African- American, Winnie reported 23 years of teaching

experience, of which twenty was first grade at Walker. She named elementary education as her certification. In response to the query about training in literacy and reading instruction, Winnie stated "Reading Academy and Balance [sic] Literacy are offered during the summer. We had training here on our campus for Balance [sic] Literacy." She identified Reading Recovery as her source of training to work with students who have language differences; no other area of difference was addressed.

Winnie's descriptive picture included the outlines of three hands on which each finger carried text. On the hand labeled "Helping Hands to All," she wrote on individual fingers "My Family, My Students, Hungry, Sick, under privileged children." [Letter case in text reflects that used by Winnie.] Text on fingers of another hand identified "Helping Hands" was "To drug Abusers, Alcoholics, The dying, the Lost, TO those who are depressed." Fingers on the third "Helping Hands" hand were marked "Foster children, Un-wed mothers, Prisoners, Lonely, homeless." On the edge of her paper, Winnie composed the paragraph below.

> I describe myself as one who would rather see others happy before myself and to make sure their needs are met. I have one life to live and I must do good everyday to those I'm in contact with, because this is my only chance to reach out to those who are less fortunate than I am and share a little joy.

Winnie responded to a query about her childhood SES with:

> I grew up in a home with a single parent and nine children. Nine. But I had the most wonderful mother in the world. We never knew we was poor until I like, we moved from east Texas in 1966, and my aunt lived next door to me, because we had love in our family, I didn't know I was poor, because I had someone who loved me.

In summary, eight teacher participants from Hope and Walker Elementary Schools participated in the study. The women, aged 29 to over 60 years old, reported between four and forty-one years of teaching experience. Though their paths to the observed classes varied, all had prior experience working in schools serving large low SES, high CLD populations. Each teacher had participated in several forms of literacy training through the school and district in which she worked.

Data

Data Collection

Data collection occurred over eight weeks during the Spring 2003 semester. Interviews, classroom observations and debriefings, demographic survey, descriptive self-portrait, and document analysis provided data. Each source gave greater depth to the study. The following discussion explicates procedures of data collection.

The original proposal called for three interviews per teacher and twelve weeks of observations in the classrooms. However, to secure entry into the

schools, the district's research and development office required reduction in the number of interviews to two, and the number of classroom observations to six.

Elimination of the first interview, which was designed to garner insight into the teachers' existential meanings that arise from one's "long history and are more or less a part of the individual's personal identity" (van den Berg, 2001, p.580), required that another method be employed to capture that data. A brief Teacher Survey and Descriptive Self Portrait were distributed to, and collected from each teacher to provide cursory information and context for later interviews (see Appendix C for participants' Descriptive Self-Portraits).

Different foci guided the subsequent interviews with each teacher (Seidman, 1998). The first interview emphasized teachers' contemporary experiences, notably how they define literacy, their perceptions of their students, as well as the strengths and challenges they associate with their students. The second interview specifically addressed their articulation of decision-making for literacy instruction. It also included questions that arose from observations regarding tutoring, pre-referral, teaching efficacy, reflection upon the meaning of their decisions for instruction, and the impact of those decisions on student outcomes. (See Appendix for interview questions.) Interviews occurred approximately every three weeks within the six week observation period, before or after school, at mutually agreed upon times and locations. Audiotape and

researcher's notes recorded the interviews. Participants received copies of tape transcripts for review and comment.

The school principals and reading specialists participated in individual, one-time interviews to provide context regarding school climate and expectations for reading instruction.

Classroom observations occurred weekly for six weeks in each class, lasting approximately 60-90 minutes during reading and language arts instruction. Although audiotapes were considered to augment researcher's field notes and observational data, limited return of permission slips from students precluded such use. As a participant observer, the researcher was available to assist the teacher as needed, as well as observe the class (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Observations encompassed cultural responsiveness (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay 2000; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997), teacher-student interactions (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995), classroom literacy environment (Duke, 2000), and instructional strategies (Allington, 2001). Observational data helped shape and contextualize interview questions.

Students whose parents granted consent participated in the final component of the study – document analysis. Teachers are required to administer the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and DRA to their students; review of student records yielded some information from those assessments, and any other information relevant to literacy instruction.

Although a schedule of interviews and observations existed, the purpose of qualitative research is "generating concepts and understanding", consideration was given to the need for added contact time to gather sufficient data (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p.71). Four criteria determine conclusion of data collection: (a) exhaustion of sources - participants reveal no added information, (b) saturation - observations and documents yield little or no new data, (c) regularities in data - the data sources converge towards common themes, and (d) over-extension, when unrelated discourse dominates (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Within weeks five and six, all four criteria were met.

Data Analysis

The primary intent of data analysis was determination of teachers' explanations of the factors that influence their decision-making for literacy instruction. Analysis occurred within and beyond the field, throughout the entire study; it was a recursive, ubiquitous element of this qualitative study (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Discussion of three stages of data analysis follow: in the field, immediately upon leaving the field, and from a distance (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p.9).

In the field, data analysis occurred via inscription, description, and transcription (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The first level of analysis, inscription, involved identification of what appeared important to teachers. Initial interviews and observations gave definition to that which the participants

considered noteworthy and provided each individual's historical context, thus framing later inquiry (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; van den Berg, 2001). Herein, an initial review of notes from observations and debriefings suggested points to note and questions to ask of all participants, thus provided structure for consequent interactions and observations (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). To facilitate later retrieval and analysis, summary sheets of each source were used to record topics, participants, and researcher impressions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data then required organization, the subsequent arena of analysis.

Organizing data characterized this next level of analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). A log of data sources including interviews, observations, and document reviews was maintained. Audiotapes from interviews were labeled with participant codes and numbered. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher, then migrated into QSR N6 (2002). Other raw data such as observation notes, field notes, debriefings, stored by source, teacher surveys and descriptive self-portraits, and item summaries grouped initially by theme (reading instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, to-be-determined). The lattermost step represented the beginning of another phase of analysis - coding.

The final stage of analysis occurred at a distance from the field. Herein, data underwent study that was more rigorous. After transcribing the interviews, coding initially focused on teachers' response to the first question, their descriptions of literacy. Understandings appeared to migrate consistently towards

either a text-based conceptualization, or a conceptualization that encompassed text but extended the scope of literacy. Concurrently, their perceptions of students seemed a ubiquitous factor in what and how they taught, thus the emergence of that theme. However, specific words and phrases appeared throughout, thus suggesting a need for text searches on key words and phrases, which resulted in the theme perceptions of professional knowledge and efficacy. With those codes, data sources were reviewed again to locate proof and disproof of the themes. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) describe the process as "structural analysis" (p.68) where items are coded, patterns identified, and structures (larger patterns) compose a picture of the phenomenon studied.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Data adequacy and accuracy establish trustworthiness of an inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asseverated five criteria to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Certain techniques indicated attainment of each criterion, as noted below.

Accurate, adequate representations of multiple realities bespeak credibility; several procedures increased the likelihood of credible findings. Prolonged engagement allowed time to develop rapport with teachers and students, test possible misinformation, and learn the class and school culture. The eight weeks in the field included approximately six hours of observation and two and a half hours of interviews with each teacher. Persistent observation -

approximately 1 hour in each class weekly for six weeks - promoted identification of elements most relevant to the research questions. Data saturation occurred during weeks five and six, thus assuring the adequacy of time in the field. Triangulation occurred through multiple interactions with different data sources (interviews, observations ,debriefings, and documents). Peer debriefing further assured credible findings. Checks for representativeness ensued through the investigation of outliers, negative cases, and extreme cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Member checking through participants' review of interview transcripts, provided the final layer of credibility.

Transferability requires in-depth presentation of data that enables the reader to determine appropriateness of the findings for alternative settings. Thus, transferability is met through rich, detailed description within the final report.

Finally, an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to promote dependability and confirmability of the findings. A colleague evaluated record keeping and records. The audit trail review included raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, materials related to researcher's intentions and dispositions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 319-320). Audits occurred throughout the study to facilitate effective data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Summary

This interpretive case study used ethnographic methods. The cases included four kindergarten and four first grade teachers in low SES, high CLD schools. Interviews, observations and debriefings, demographic surveys, descriptive self-portraits, and document reviews provided data to explore the teachers' explanations of factors that influence their decision making for literacy instruction.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine how kindergarten and first grade teachers in schools serving large populations of low socioeconomic status (SES), culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students explain their decision making for literacy instruction. Teachers from two urban elementary schools participated. Varied data sources informed the study.

Findings

The purpose of the study was to determine the factors to which kindergarten and first grade teachers in low SES, high CLD schools attribute their decision making for literacy instruction. Data analysis revealed emerging themes regarding teachers' understandings of literacy, instructional practices, perceptions of their teaching, perceptions of their students, reasons they articulate for their instructional decisions. The following discussion recounts teachers' understandings, practices, perceptions, and explanations unveiled during data collection.

Understandings of Literacy: How Teachers Define Literacy

The research question addressed teachers' explanations for decision-making for literacy instruction. To examine this question fully, teachers' understandings of literacy required explanation. The first interview began with "Tell me what literacy looks like at the (kindergarten/first grade) level." Follow-

up probes included, “Specifically, what does reading look like?” and “Include content, student behaviors, and learning environment.” (See Appendix C for Interview Protocol.)

Overall, teachers disclosed some common understandings of literacy involving textually bound skills of reading. Some specifically included writing and spelling as skills encompassed by literacy. Several spoke to literacy’s role in making connections, within the school world and school tasks, and beyond the school to the individual students’ worlds. Still others understood literacy to extend beyond the confines of text and academics, to engulf outcomes such as academic success in school, and independence; attributes often associated with being literate in mythological middle class America.

Categorization of textually bound and skill-based, or text and beyond, developed during data analysis; understandings appeared to converge around those two points. In the following sections teachers recount their understandings of literacy as either text bound, or as text and beyond. Teachers’ responses are organized by school, then grade level.

Literacy as textually bound and skill based. Teachers generally agreed that literacy included textually bound skills such as letter identification, sound symbol associations, blending sounds, and eventually encoding and decoding.

When asked, “What does literacy look like in your kindergarten?” Walker kindergarten teachers immediately addressed text-based skills. For example, Sue asserted,

> It is learning the letters of the alphabet, recognizing what the letter is and the sound that it makes. And being able to put those together. And seeing it in a book, and recognizing a word, [recognizing that] sounds come together to make a word and being able to put those sounds together. And, it's also incorporating, putting that into writing as well, and spelling. And that's probably the biggest part of kindergarten.

Sue distinguished literacy from reading, “I see reading as the phonemical [sic] part, and literacy as more as getting into the book part.”

The other kindergarten teacher from Walker, Hilary, described letter recognition as a skill, mentioning:

> I see a lot [sic] of kids focusing on learning how to form the letters, words, in particular those in their names. … They begin to attach connections to forming the letters, and understanding what the letters say, and how they form to make words, that they need to.

Hilary also noted a connection between reading and writing. She stated:

> In a literacy program in kindergarten, you would first of all see a lot of ability, based upon developmental progress and developmental growth. I

> think, what I've seen in my seven years of teaching kindergarten, I see is a lot of emerging readers and emerging writers in all of my classes.

Although they first addressed skills such as letter identification, the kindergarten teachers also considered meaning making a part of literacy. For example, Hilary stated, "I think that it's just important that they make the connection between reading and writing, and how important those two go hand in hand."

First grade teachers from Walker also pointed to text in response to the question "What does literacy look like in first grade?" Nan hesitated before responding, asking, "At the beginning?" Mentioning some items similar to the kindergarten teachers, she replied briefly, "Letters, just letters. No vocabulary. No sight words. Very little. Lucky if we have that."

However, the other first grade teacher's initial response addressed reading specifically. Winnie referred to literacy as a "reading approach." She stated, "Literacy is a reading approach that we use to teach reading to students through big books, reading out loud, phonics, just a combination of skills to teach reading." Encouraged to elaborate, Winnie concluded,

> I expect to see cooperative behavior. I expect to see students motivated to learn. I expect to see students excited and responding…. [They should be engaged in] journal writing. Independent writing. Independent reading. Group reading. Shared reading. Guiding reading. Reading their books, DEAR time – all of that involves reading.

She explicated her general expectations for behavior, as well as the activities in which the students engaged.

The kindergarten teachers from Hope similarly focused on text at first. Meg characterized literacy in kindergarten as “First it's the ABCs, letters and sounds, and knowing them and identifying them. And then of course, it's blending them and beginning to read.” In addition, Meg specified the role of comprehension in literacy and reading. She offered,“It's comprehending also. It's not just that's a B, it makes the /b/ sound, or that's a boy. It's comprehending, understanding what you're reading, what you're writing, what you're thinking, what you're talking about.”

The other kindergarten teacher from Hope, Dora, attended to the very specific skill of matching with respect to understanding text. She observed that kindergarten expectations included one to one correspondence, a great difference from her earlier instructional experience in a pre-kindergarten class. Dora provided this comment,

> Now, it is a lot more matching one to one in kindergarten, while before it wasn't. Before it used to be more that you were just reading to them and pointing things out. Now, they are actually one to one matching; there's more emphasis on having a reading group, which is different than before.

When describing literacy, several Hope teachers noted the reciprocity of reading and writing. Meg related, “It really seems to me that [literacy] is not just the reading, it's the writing part too, like their journal is.”

First grade teacher Oma responded differently, explaining literacy as a “process [that includes] reading and writing and communication, all in one package.” Asked to elaborate upon reading more specifically, she replied, “Reading entails the decoding – encoding process. And afterwards, I really view reading as comprehension. So, if I feel like a child can not articulate what he has read, then I don’t feel they’re [sic] reading.”

Cara said, “In first grade, in my classroom, my literacy looks like reading, reading, reading, and phonics! Kids being able to make words as they read, to connect their outside world to their reading responses.” She provided the following example of a lesson early in the school year:

> We’ll review, [about] 6 letters, and then we put two with one vowel. I think [the letter] a was the first vowel. And then, we’d take all the consonants and see how many [words] we could make that have /–at/ at the end. And make the connections [within the word family]. Then they would spell on their fingers the three [letter] words.

Cara spoke of the text and skill components of literacy, as well as making connections therein.

In summary, the teachers' understanding of literacy included text and skills necessary to manipulate and garner meaning from such. Components noted included letter recognition, sound – symbol correspondence, blending sounds, word building, reading and writing connected text, spelling, and comprehension. Most of the teachers spoke of reading beyond encoding, acknowledging that literacy encompassed more than reading, but also incorporated writing and spelling. However, some extended their understanding of literacy beyond text and skills alone; they suggested literacy embraced more than print-related tasks.

Literacy as text and beyond. Although all teachers reported a textually bound understanding of literacy, only some teachers described literacy in terms that encompassed more than text and skills. They mentioned the role of literacy as expanding beyond text, as involving the world and connections. Though those teachers acknowledged the role of skills and textuality of literacy, they opined that confining one's understanding as such fails to provide a complete education to students. For example, Meg summarized, "Literacy is understanding the world around them."

Cara spoke of several components of literacy, but articulated the value of connections as well. "In first grade, in my classroom, my literacy looks like reading, reading, reading, and phonics. [It's] kids being able to make words as they read, to connect their outside world to their reading responses." Several times Cara spoke of students making connections as a crucial part of literacy,

connections between their present knowledge and new learning with respect to skills, the materials they read, and their world at large. So too the first grade teachers from Hope spoke of the role of reading in literacy, yet extended literacy beyond encoding and decoding.

During the initial interview, all eight teachers confidently expressed understandings of literacy. The majority of teachers described a textually bound model of literacy, focusing on specific decoding and encoding skills. Winnie, however, described literacy as an instructional approach to reading. Several teachers extended the scope of literacy to include connections and understandings of the world at large. During the post-observation debriefings, the role of teachers' perceptions in their decision-making became increasingly evident. Discussion of teachers' perceptions about teaching literacy with respect to affective components, and to their ability to do so, follows.

Teachers' Perceptions about Teaching Literacy

Throughout interviews and observation debriefings teachers from both schools generally reported positive self-perceptions regarding their teaching ability and knowledge. Their perceptions of themselves as educators appeared to relate to years of classroom experience, professional preparation and development. For example, though both stated positive perceptions of their ability to teach, Cara who accumulated over 40 years of teaching experience reported such differently than did Nan who garnered only four years of teaching

experience. They characterized differently what they wanted to achieve and how they wanted to achieve their goals. All teachers infused observations regarding their professional ability and knowledge with remarks about the affective components of teaching. The discussion below focuses upon teachers' reported perceptions of their teaching – affective and professional dimensions.

Affective dimensions. Teachers mentioned affective dimensions of teaching as they replied to interview questions, during the less formal debriefings, or in their descriptive self-portraits. Three foci emerged from their remarks: (1) teaching events from which they gained gratification, or they enjoyed, characterized by "I like," "I love," or "it feels good;" (2) teaching events or behaviors in which they felt a responsibility to engage, characterized by "I need to;" and (3) teaching events or behaviors in which they desire to engage, characterized by "I want." The following discussion is organized first around those three points, then by school and grade.

Teachers spoke of what they liked or loved. They talked about particularities from which they gained gratification, events that left them "feeling good."

The kindergarten teachers at Walker Elementary noted things that they greatly enjoyed about teaching. On her drawing, Sue wrote,

> I love to empower children to explore and learn new concepts. When I see a child engaged and discover a concept for the first time and then share

> that knowledge with others, I get very excited and feel very fulfilled. … [I] love to teach others to read.

Hilary spoke with similar enthusiasm during the second interview stating that,

> I feel like I love what I do…and I love kinder. … I love the other grades as well, but something about kinder – kids are still interested, and they love to learn, and they love you, and all that's good! That's great!

She also recalled an experience looping with her class, exclaiming, "I had a group in kinder and I looped to first, then I looped to second. And it was wonderful! It was just an incredible experience!"

The first grade teachers also alluded to positive affective experiences. For example, in her drawing, Nan was smiling, with thought bubbles showing specific students' names. During the second interview, Winnie stated outright, "I've been in a lot of classrooms and I like to sit and talk with children."

Teachers at Hope Elementary also identified experiences that they enjoyed throughout the study. In their descriptive self-portraits, both kindergarten teachers drew themselves smiling, and referred to the pleasure they experienced teaching. Meg wrote, "Loves kids and teaching." More elaborately, Dora explained, "I have lots of fun with my class and laugh a lot. I know I am fortunate to have a job that allows me to have fun and be challenged."

First grade teachers at Hope spoke of affective issues as well. Examples below were provided during interviews. In the context of students' need for connections and understanding for example, Cara noted a positive affective consequence she enjoyed from teaching, "And that makes me feel good too because you've connected something to their reading with the literacy that you have." Oma mentioned her preference for teaching reading skills and content – area material through research projects because the students are "very interested, and, of course, I like to [do research]!"

All eight teachers identified at least one thing that made them smile, one thing from which they garnered gratification. They expressed such positive affect through their drawings , and in their speech. In addition, every teacher was observed smiling and laughing with her students at some time during the study. Nan was observed consoling a sobbing child by letting him sit on her lap and cry, hugging him, and then talking quietly to him..

The phrase "I need to" interspersed teachers' responses and remarks. The majority of teachers used the phrase at least once in the context of responsibility for teaching their students, though some characterized it as teachers' responsibilities, and some as the responsibilities of others. For example, at Walker, kindergarten teacher Hilary averred, "I need to know, as their teacher, where they are on that spectrum [of mastering sound – symbol associations], so

that I can plan accordingly." Sue also spoke of her responsibility to respond to the students' current levels and expected achievement. When discussing planning for students' instruction, Sue asserted results of requisite tests (e.g., TPRI and DRA) helped ensure that "I knew the areas that I need to get in [sic]…the areas I need to push [to facilitate students reaching desired levels by year's end.]." Both Sue and Hilary couched their teaching responsibilities in terms of what they need to do.

First grade teachers from Walker, however, also associated need as something required of or from parents or the children. Winnie referred to talking with parents, noting "I need you to work with this child…. And I need you to do thus and thus at home to reinforce what I do in the classroom." Similarly, Nan spoke of addressing the class during times when students were struggling, and pointing to their responsibility. She said, "So I told the class, 'I've got a problem and I need your help'." During a discussion about risk factors, Nan stated too, that "if I don't get the support from the parent that I need in order to get help [for a student], then that [child] is at risk." Another exchange suggested that although Nan might not speak of need as in her need to do something to facilitate students' success, she considered that responsibility. During the second interview, she spoke of the potentially "[lost] opportunities" for a student who might not have home-based support for use of school English and her responsibility as a teacher in ameliorating that possibility. Walkers' first grade teachers' use of "I need" usually referred to a requirement from someone else, either a parent or student.

Hope teachers all spoke of responsibility for students' learning in terms of "I need." For example, when discussing a student who was struggling, Meg observed, "I need to sit with just him and help him hold his pencil and have him write his name." Dora spoke of wanting and needing to support her students more effectively. She stated, "I kinda realize that … I need to figure out a way to pick up everybody instead of saying, 'Oh gee, they didn't get it.'"

First grade teachers Cara and Oma also spoke of the responsibility in terms of "I need to." For instance, Cara asserted, "I try to build on some [students'] strengths that I need to make sure that they're all going to be successful in reading in the second grade." Similarly, Oma spoke of her responsibility to review all proscribed curriculum, "I need to cover certain things." Kindergarten and first grade teachers from Hope spoke in terms of "I need to" when identifying their responsibilities as teachers.

The final focus emerged as "I want." Teachers used the phrase regarding what they wanted as individuals, as well as what they wanted for their students. The kindergarten teachers from Walker spoke of both. Sue addressed a personal issue when she stated, "I want to feel that all of [my instructional] decisions give what I'm looking for as far as final outcome." She spoke too of desires for the students' learning, "I want them to have the ability to identify a word, to sound out a word, to recognize that they have the power to do that." Likewise, Hilary

mentioned her personal concern, “I feel I have an area [of professional development] I want to grow in because I’m in a community really now that is very diverse.” In addition, about her class she asserted, “”I want my kids to feel that this is a place to practice, this is a place to learn, it is not a place to fail, to be considered stupid or weird or whatever negative connotation or labels that they want to put on each other.”

Sometimes the meanings overlap, for example first grade teacher Winnie stated, “I want those [second grade] teachers coming to me and saying, ‘You know what, I didn’t have to teach your child, your children anything!’” She also emphasized her goals for the students, “I’m concerned about these kids in my classroom. I want to see them learn. And I want to see them to progress!” Speaking of a goal for a student, Walker’s other first grade teacher, Nan, recounted saying to a child, “I want you to spell the word rid.” She also used “I want” from an individual perspective when discussing the role of the reading recovery teacher; Nan exclaimed, “I want to be her!” During interviews, teachers from Walker identified individual desires and goals, as well as outcomes and goals they desired for their students, as characterized by the phrase, “I want.”.

Meg, a kindergarten teacher from Hope spoke of her goals for the students, stating, “I want them to feel successful.” Dora compounded her individual goal with her responsibility to the students in the statement noted

above, “I kinda [sic] realized that I want … to figure out a way to pick up everybody.’”

First grade teachers at Hope used “I want” differently from each other. Cara spoke in terms of goals for her students. For example, in the context of instruction for students, she averred, “I want to make sure that they understand everything that they’re supposed to be doing.” Conversely, Oma talked about the autonomy she experienced in the classroom, “I really do have free reign to do what I want to do [with respect to content delivery].” Although the Hope teachers used “I want” differently, they all shared affective experiences with respect to teaching.

In short, all of the teachers expressed or demonstrated affective components in their perceptions of teaching. Nearly all explicitly identified something they enjoyed, responsibility they felt towards the students, and outcomes desired for themselves of their students. Inextricably entwined with affect are teachers’ perceptions of their professional knowledge and efficacy as educators, discussion of which follows.

Professional knowledge and efficacy dimensions. As teachers talked of their practice, mention of their knowledge and skills recurred frequently. Their remarks seemed to coalesce around the ideas of pedagogy, content – related strategies and information, and relationships. Concurrently, teachers’ comments about their efficacy as individuals, and as teachers as a group, suggested that

avenue warranted attention. Consequently, during the final interview, teachers were presented with a series of statements adapted from the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). These statements provided a common language with which to probe more deeply teachers' perceptions regarding their ability to handle successfully a variety of teaching related issues. In addition, they were asked, "How has your decision making for literacy instruction evolved during your career?" and "To what do you attribute the changes or maintenance of your instructional decision-making? The following discussion will first review teachers' responses to the statements regarding efficacy, then their perceptions of their professional knowledge.

There was generally a very high level of congruence among the participants' responses to the Teacher Efficacy Scale statements. Consequently, this portion of the discussion is organized by response. Teachers' remarks are included only when their response varied from the majority, or responses diverged. Part of the scale included "I" statements – teachers' perceptions of their efficacy as teaching individuals, and the other – teachers' perceptions of efficacy of schooling. Discussion of those prompts that addressed teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy, the "I" statements follow.

All teachers responded affirmatively to the statement "If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase he/her retention in the next lesson." Similarly, most teachers agreed, "if a student

in [their] class becomes disruptive and noisy, [they] feel assured that [they] know some techniques to redirect him/her quickly." Cara, a first grade teacher from Hope and the most experienced participant, disagreed with that statement, but offered no comment. Again all but one teacher agreed with the statement "If one of my students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty." Meg, a kindergarten teacher from Hope Elementary and a relative novice as a fourth year teacher, disagreed, yet did not elaborate. These results suggest that, at least in the abstract, the participants felt capable of reteaching as needed, managing students' behavior, and assessing the appropriateness of an assignment for a student.

Two other, similar statements elicited agreement from all but Meg once more. The majority of teachers agreed with the statements "When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students" and "If I really try hard, I can get through to most difficult or unmotivated students." Meg remarked upon the statements, revealing, "I think that way, but the reality is that it's not always based on how hard I'm trying …It's not always like that; I really try hard with Donna and I don't feel like I'm getting there with her."

In response to "If parents would do more for their children, I could do more," most teachers disagreed, including Dora, a kindergarten teacher from Hope, but who interjected "but it would sure be nice if they didn't come with so

much [emotional] baggage." Several teachers remarked upon this item. Sue, another kindergarten teacher but from Walker, noted that, "It's amazing what [you] can do without parents … There's going to be a limitation but that is not an excuse." Meg opined, "If parents would do more for their children, the children could do more, but that doesn't mean I can do more." Unlike their colleagues, Cara and Nan, a first grade teacher from Walker, agreed with the statement. Nan stated, "If they would help, then I can get farther." Cara offered no additional comments.

The other, more global part of the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) included questions to probe perceptions the efficacy of schooling. Again, responses generally coalesced around a single point. All teachers disagreed with the statement "The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background." The majority of teachers differed with "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his/her home environment." Although offering no explanation, Cara, however, agreed with the statement. With a single exception, teachers disagreed with "A teacher is very limited in what she can achieve because a student's home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement." Nan agreed with the statement but declined to comment upon it further. Finally, nearly all teachers disagreed with "If students aren't disciplined

at home, they aren't likely to accept any discipline." Meg remarked, "I do kinda agree with that."

With a few exceptions, teachers reported positive perceptions of their efficacy as individuals, and of the efficacy of teaching in general. The two least experienced teachers, Meg and Nan, and the most experienced teacher, Cara diverged from the majority responses. Cara and Nan disagreed with the group twice; Meg disagreed three times. Overall, according their responses to the scale, participants considered themselves effective teachers. However, do those perceptions carry over into their discourse and instruction? The discussion below encompasses teachers' perceptions of their professional knowledge as reported during interviews, observations, and debriefings. School and grade again serve to organize teachers' responses.

Teachers at Hope, including the youngest of the school's participants - Meg, noted that their decision-making evolved during their teaching career. She stated confidence in her current teaching, yet admitted,

> Ok, the first year, I was just trying to get through, and I did exactly what my mentor did. And uh, as I went through different staff developments, really the PDA [school district's Professional Development Academy] -I talked about that earlier, those classes, and the Literacy Back Bone, and reading my own stuff, and the building blocks, um, I got kinda, changed things. I feel like I'm stronger at delivering the same content. It's not as if

> the whole method of, or the concept of literacy has changed, but I feel like that it's more apparent that I don't [have to] think about it quite as much.

Meg remarks suggest development of both her pedagogical and content knowledge.

The other kindergarten teacher, Dora, reported altering her instruction based upon district requirements, but asserted that her philosophy remained unchanged. She averred,

> Just because [the district leaders] push for more literacy in kindergarten, and pre-k too, and just kinda seeing that it really does [promote early literacy skills], it can be done. [However] it's not going to change my philosophy of teaching drastically.

Asked to explicate her philosophy of teaching, Dora said, "More developmental, more uh, expose them to a lot of things instead of just phonemic things. But, it can be done." As pre-K teacher for 13 years, Dora admitted skepticism when first introduced to balanced literacy in kindergarten, but reported that student outcomes and the collaborative structure of the training ameliorated her concerns. She recalled her opinion changed due to,

> Seeing the success that some kids have. And, going to those workshops when we had a balanced literacy trainer – somebody who came in and actually shared a lesson and developed a lesson, and said, "Try this." …

> [The trainer] would actually do it with the class; it was different than having somebody just tell you.…She got to see the pitfalls of "Yeah, that was really a great lesson, but did you see that three people over there weren't listening" … and then we got to talk about how to fix that also, instead of it just being somebody pointing out problems.

Dora reported content-related knowledge.

The first grade teachers at Hope reported confidence in their professional knowledge; Cara cited her extended tenure, Oma her studies as the explanation for their evaluation. During discussion about her perceptions of literacy, Cara attributed her knowledge to her four decades in the classroom, noting with a sigh, "Before they said something about reading and literacy, I was doing it anyway! But I mean that's another word." She further noted,

> I've been doing it [integrating literature and skills] all along. My thing is literature, and how it has changed? It hasn't really changed, it's the process and the words that they're using because I used literature units, like I have units, units on rabbits, units on Dr. Seuss and I always pull the literature books.

Though much less experienced than Cara, Oma similarly appeared confident. About changes in her teaching over time, she noted, "I have evolved. Good Lord! I have come a long way, really!" Oma added she learned reading "strategy after strategy" in graduate school, and that she "always stay[s] up on…

new ideas like that in ERIC [Educational Resources Information Center, national information system funded by the U.S. Department of Education]. Both teachers addressed content-related aspects of their professional knowledge.

The teachers from Walker generally expressed confidence in their professional knowledge. Hilary averred that her openness facilitated her development as an instructor, her professional growth. "I think how [my teaching and decision-making have] changed over the years has been based on my openness, my willingness to try new things." She further asserted that she considers outcomes, not mere habit, when making decisions, noting her "willingness to realize that what worked before won't work now, based on [it] just doesn't work!" She recounted previous experience looping with a class.

> I taught for a, three year looping. In a low-income school. It had never been done. … for three years I was the pilot program in the district. … my first and second grade classes had the highest reading scores in the district, which was great! It showed that this pilot [looping] thing works.

Hilary noted the stability of the group over time and attributed part of her ability to succeed to the relationships that she developed with parents in the community. She speaks of her professional knowledge with respect to building community relationships.

> But I think that part of that retention [17 of original 22 students in a school with a highly mobile population] was mine, in terms of the relationship

that I had with those parents, and those parents made the choice to keep their children - and that was a mark of success. And I was really big on letting them understand that no, I can't do this without you. Um, and I had a pretty good strong parent base.

Hilary concluded the anecdote by noting the challenge posited by looping, and her ability to meet that challenge. It is unclear if she referred to pedagogical or instructional knowledge.

Anyway, the whole point of bringing it up was that by the end of second, or by the end of first grade year, I had talked to our principal and so forth, and he said do you want to move to second. And I'm like," Well gee, I've used up all my tricks! I don't know if I can do it another year! I'll have to start all over with, with new stuff!" So, that was good! It gave me an opportunity to challenge myself, you know. I had to think of new stuff because the kids had seen it all. (laughs) And so I did.

The other kindergarten teacher from Walker, Sue referred to tenacity and training as important to her instruction, noting its critical role with respect to struggling learners. Again, discrimination between instructional and pedagogical knowledge is unclear.

You know, you can always do the whole group instruction, you can always improve the lesson plans and the curriculum, but when you do the one on one tutoring, or the helping the slower students that's when you

> have to pull in your training and your resources of what you, your professional development. You're going to find every way possible for that child to learn. And you want to just play with whatever ... it always seems to go somewhere else. I've never followed any straight path, you know! (laughs) No textbook example. I've never seen that, done that yet, I don't think. You pull out everything you have to get that child up.

Winnie spoke with great certainty regarding her professional expertise. She touched upon the content and strategies that she perceives as differentiating her from her peers. Winnie referred to her twenty-three years in the classroom and asserted,

> I consider myself to be extraordinary. I'll put it like this, because every, no one teaches the way I teach. I really haven't had a chance to visit all of the classrooms, but I was a mentor teacher this year, and uh, I had some teachers come in and visit my classroom.

Winnie conflates pedagogy and content somewhat in the following remarks.

> A lot of them don't teach phonics. They don't, they don't do whole group lessons. They don't --- well, I don't get it. But I've been in a lot of classrooms and I like to sit and talk with children. Make them think on a higher level. And I have not seen a lot of that.

Unlike the other first grade teacher at Walker, Nan focused on context with respect to her practice. She talked about how her former life skills class

resembled her current first grade group, and her expectations that they learn like "anybody else." Nan recounted:

> I taught a Life Skills science class [in high school], so they'd have an out class because nobody would take them. You know. Those kids needed that type of -- I mean they were exactly like these [first grade] kids. Blank slate, wanting to learn, wanting to please you - and nobody'll [sic] take them. You know. I taught them the same thing I taught anybody else [who was not in life skills.]

She paralleled students' abilities yet contrasted the attitudes and behaviors in elementary versus high school. Nan explained:

> I told them humungous and bioluminescence during a eval[sic]. And everyone of [the students] turned to that teacher, or the principal, because she asked them what it meant, and they said, "it means they glow." You know they can do it! They've just got to have --- so, they.... I mean, it really hasn't changed as far as all that. I believe that they can all do it - still, but I'm not fighting --- the -- you're-not-going-to-be-able- to-do-this-because- nobody-else-has. I'm not having to deal with that. I'm not fighting the, you know, the behavior issues. I mean, if I have a behavior issue here, it's not somebody coming at my back with a - you know, because they don't like me for that day. It's more of a I'm going to stick my tongue out at you or he called me a - you know.

She selected the site where she felt behaviors would be less problematic than her secondary experiences, as well as populations she perceived as still excited about learning. Nan concluded that her decision-making and instruction have not evolved exactly, instead she has found the setting most fitting for access her "fullest advantage."

> I don't think it's more that I've changed ---- I think that it's more my philosophy has met the right population in order to --- you know, I moved my cheese in order to be able to have my philosophy utilized to the fullest advantage.

Although Nan did not mention it in response to interview questions, Nan reported during a debriefing that she was enrolled in a local teaching university program to learn more about instruction in the primary, general education setting. She shared that the instructor visited her class occasionally and provided her with suggestions for instructional and behavioral issues. The experience may support both pedagogical and instructional knowledge. Nan also recounted that, "last year I got 'exceeds expectations' in professional development [on the teacher evaluation instrument]!" because of her willingness to attend workshops and training.

Most teachers acknowledged that their teaching has evolved during their career through professional development, university-based programs, or

experience. Of their professional knowledge, content was explicitly identified most frequently, although pedagogical development opportunities may have accompanied the experiences. Developing professional relationships with the community was another area which a teacher identified as relevant to her professional knowledge and efficacy. Unlike her colleagues who reported changes in their teaching, one teacher observed that she moved in lieu of changing her instruction. The two most junior teachers, and one most senior teacher diverged from the majority's responses regarding a few items on the Teacher Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). However, as a group, the teachers generally reported perceptions of high self-efficacy and high teaching efficacy. Ubiquitous throughout all data sources, teachers' perceptions of students and their abilities emerged as a salient theme.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students and Their Abilities

During the first interview, teachers were asked to describe their students as literacy learners. Follow-up included requests to "Describe their strengths as literacy learners," as well as provide their weaknesses. Below, teachers' observations and reported perceptions of their students and the students' ability.

Teachers from Hope talked about the students learning beyond encoding and decoding, addressing the students' affective issues as well as skills and strategies. Oma responded by talking about the instruction that her students

received. She emphasized freedom and autonomy as critical components within her class also.

> I feel like they're getting a pretty good package. It's not just sitting down with a book and encoding, like I know it does happen. They have freedom. They have a lot of autonomy. The majority of students are really pulling away a lot of different skills to use, and different avenues of trying to instill that. If I can't figure it out this way then I can either ask a friend or read the whole passage or [use strategies].

Dora noted intrinsic motivation as a characteristic of her students, as well connections from prior learning.

> To me they really seem driven to pick up information, they want to enjoy the stories and the books and the literacy. They use the verses from stories that they've read in the past, and I, I think that they're really moving along, really well because I tried not to do drill and kill. I tried not to [bore them], try to keep them interested and motivated. So, I think that they really are moving forward.

Like Oma, Meg commented upon the students' ability to support each other and collaborate in literacy tasks. She also noted the importance of connections to meaningful tasks, and the participatory nature of learning for her students.

> So when we produce something, they use it. But to me, that's like real literacy learning because we're not just making it. And they help spell the word and they draw the picture so they can at least remember that that was their word, and also what that word says on the word bank. Um, so they use the room, they use the resources, they use each other! Like if they know that somebody knows how to spell the word, they'll say how do you spell friend? Because they know how.

Meg further noted students' current achievement as well as the role of risk-taking in their learning.

> Sounding out words, all of them, almost all of them are sounding out words on their own. … They're trying it on their own, they're trying to find a way to figure it out before they come to me. And I've told them, that I want you to try it out, last thing is to ask me the question. And then I guess as literacy learners, they're involved. They're involved in the activities that we do; they participate.

Teachers from Walker described the students as literacy learners somewhat differently from their colleagues at Hope, referring less to students' contextualized literacy learning and more to students' skills in isolation, or levels of functioning. For example, Nan said

> I mean, it's a very free mobile room with a bunch of people low, and a bunch of people in the middle, and then a whole bunch of people way up

here And the ones way up here, like to help. So there's a lot of pairing, even when you know they say it's not good to pair the middle --- with the low, low, lows with the high, high, highs? But they like to do that. They like to be able to help out and share what they know, and how they figure things out. So there's a lot of buddy tutoring, ya know. And maybe a low one has figured something out that a high one hasn't figured out.

Asked what behaviors she would expect from her students as literacy learners, Winnie focused primarily on reading, using terms sometimes associated with Balanced Literacy.

Uh, reading, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, uh. The kids love reading, and this increases their vocabulary and this is a reflection of some of the kids that are reading like on second and third grade level and because when they come in in [sic] the morning, we have DEAR time, and when I read with them in small group, story time. Um, reading, reading, reading.

Noting affective issues for her students, Hilary responded to the query by asserting:

I think of my kids as literacy learners when I hear them reading to themselves or reading to other kids. “Hey, look, I know this word. I can read this!" And, when I start to hear wind of that, which comes during the semester, whatever, it's great! Alright! What to me really, I think, gives

me the goose bumps, is when I have those kids that're [sic] still struggling with their name but they're still able to read just one word. And I hear them, and they are so excited. And that, to me, I think, would be probably the example of literacy learning would be for my kids.

Hilary further explained students' use and enjoyment of literacy based activities. She recounted:

When I think my kids, they're active in their learning and their writing. And when, well, one of those things that they get into is how to share their addresses and stuff, and when they start learning to write all that, they love to do that, and you know they pass that all around and stuff. … But I think that, I have kids who throughout my class, no matter what their ability, they enjoy writing and reading. They enjoy it. They might nor make a lot of sense of what they're reading, or they may think that the writing, you know, says other things, but that's emerging. That's how they struggle through. … They realize that there's a lot to learn and you never stop, yet, they putting into practice what they're learning.

Like Hilary, Sue addressed affective issues of her students, in addition to specific skills such as directionality.

My kids love to read. My kids love the books, and, and that made me nervous in the beginning of the year because I wasn't sure because how do I , how do I make reading fun? … but, they love the reading, they love

> the challenge of that. So, I have not had problems with any, even my low kids, even though they might not know what the letter sound is right now, they're doing it, they're imitating.

In addition, Sue highlighted skills that some students demonstrated and acknowledged their varied levels of skill.

> They've got the book skills down. They know directionality. They know, they're beginning to know the word concept and sentences. Some of them don't know that, but they're starting to follow along. So, even though some of them don't know those letter sounds, they're still getting knowledge of what a book is, so when they get those letter sounds, that reading is going to go like that [snaps fingers]. They already know what it's going to look like when they get it down and they know that they can sound it out. They might not be doing the right sounds yet.

Teachers from both schools addressed a variety of issues regarding their perceptions of their students. When asked specifically about the students as literacy learners, skills were mentioned. Comments regarding varied levels of preparedness for schooling and reading issued from all teachers. However, some teachers focused on the skills students had yet to acquire, while others focused on enhancing and extending the skills students possessed. Given teachers' understandings and perceptions, the following section covers their observed instructional practices; organization is by school and grade level once more.

Instructional ctices

Classroom observations of each participant occurred weekly for six weeks, resulting in 48 observations. Most occurred in the morning because teachers provided the bulk of their literacy instruction during that time. Teachers and I scheduled the first few visits with respect to dates and times, the remaining visits occurred with less formal scheduling as we established greater rapport. Consequently, both highly structured lessons were observed, as well as less-formal learning times. Instruction appeared to follow one of five formats: center-based, small group, large or whole group, informal one to one, and computer-assisted. Instructional format would overlap; for example, a teacher might work with a small group providing explicit instruction while the remainder of the class worked at centers, which might include a computer center. Detailed below are accounts of the first observation of each classroom, subsumed by the format of instruction observed. In addition, anecdotes from subsequent visits are provided where they expand the data set.

ter-based instruction. All observed kindergarten classes included center-based instruction. Teachers provided activities that students completed independently or in small groups with limited teacher intervention. The learning centers varied between classes.

In Sue's class at Walker, centers included a journal writing table, computers, self-selected books, "family life" [child-size refrigerator, stove, sink,

play dishes, and other household items], and sorting small manipulatives. During the first observation, Sue sat with a small group of four students at the journal table, where she modeled on paper, "My favorite pet is a ____" for the students to copy. She cued them as they attempted to sound out words, asked questions to extend their responses, and reminded them of the criteria for assessment on journals. Sue checked in with other centers, asking "How are you sorting your [buttons]?" redirecting students who were talking when they were supposed to be looking at books. She announced a five minute warning for students to clean up their centers and prepare to change, then provided intermittent positive statements for those who complied, "I like the way green table has put away all of the manipulatives and is waiting quietly." Students spent about fifteen minutes at each center, then moved about the room in a counter clockwise manner. After all groups visited every center, the class went outside for scheduled playtime.

Over the course of the study, Sue provided substitutions for those six centers. Changes included letter writing on white boards, worksheets, puzzles, alphabet and matching games; computers remained constant. Asked about her selection of a matching game, Sue replied, "It is self-checking, that's why I chose those." During my observations of center time, she assisted individuals when they were writing in their journals, cuing letter – sound associations, pointing to models for letter shapes, scaffolding for content. Sue also redirected students when she felt it appropriate, and asked questions to seek students' understandings

of tasks. When she was not working with students, Sue used that time to plan, prepare, and test.

As needed, Hilary, the other Walker kindergarten teacher, also used center time to address planning and testing. The remaining time, she pulled small groups for explicit instruction or worked with individual groups, providing suggestions and cues for activities. Her centers and groups were stable for each grading term. Hilary's five centers included worksheets covering topics such as sequencing, upper and lower case letter matching, letter symbol and sound matching. Observed alternative centers included word building using letter tiles, matching games, writing, independent reading, listening to books on tape, and using educational software. During one observation, Hilary engaged a small group in a mini lesson on word-building using one syllable, short vowel words during center time.

During the first observation of Hilary's class, she was in the process of assigning students to centers. Centers included: computers, stamping words with rubber stamps, matching word and letter card game, a worksheet that required coloring, cutting and pasting, and listening/books center. Hilary moved from group to group, ascertaining that students were on-task and understood the activity. At one point, she left the room unexpectedly to attend to an issue involving a student who was withdrawing from her class. Students spent approximately fifteen minutes at each center, then were directed to move to the

next center by Hilary. Once all students completed each center, the class went outside for scheduled playtime.

The kindergarten teachers at Hope also used learning centers. Meg's centers included an art or science activity related to the current theme being studied, letter writing, word building with manipulative letters, coloring a small, phonetically accessible book which the students then read, and computer. She moved from group to group, answering questions, modeling activities, scaffolding for understanding as needed.

In Dora's class, she used center time to pull small groups for explicit instruction and practice in reading and related skills. One group engaged in guided reading of a small book, another reviewed sound-symbol relationships. Two or three centers tied to the current theme through an activity or worksheet. Others remained stable such as library center and letter center.

First grade teachers also were observed, or reported, using  ters. At Walker, Winnie mentioned using centers as a means of instruction, but was not observed doing so. Nan also discussed challenges of center-based learning with the class she had, but such was not observed.

However, at Hope both Cara and Oma pulled small groups of no more than six students for intensive reading instruction, while the rest of the class worked on center-based tasks. Centers addressed comprehension, writing, poetry, content areas such as science and social studies, self-selected reading, and

Multiple learning centers covered the walls of each first grade room. Cara's students worked individually or in pairs at their assigned center; Oma's worked in groups of three or four. Centers included clearly written instructions and models of the tasks where appropriate. Providing verbal and nonverbal cues as needed, both teachers were observed actively monitoring the large group, even while teaching in small group.

Small group instruction. All teachers were observed working with small groups, either providing explicit instruction or assessing skills. In all kindergarten classes, small group instruction occurred while the remainder of the class worked, or was assigned to work, independently at learning centers. First grade teachers from Hope followed a similar format. However, at Walker, Nan used small groups as a format for assessing. Based upon the first observation in her class, description of Winnie's small group instruction follows.

Winnie spoke about the need to teach "basics" using explicit instruction. She responded to a query about what she defined as basics with the following

> Basic skills - knowing those letters' names and sounds. And putting those together. Without knowing the basics, for me, a child is not gonna [sic]. You just don't read to a child all day! You have to sit down and really teach those skills. You cannot assume that they're getting it just by you doing shared reading with them.

Winnie stressed the need to determine what a child knows and to "really teach" needed skills.

> You have to take time to sit in groups and let these kids talk to you, open up. What do you know? What sounds do you know? If I put these letters together, what sound do they make? If I put these phonograms, these, these, what are these words going to make? So I believe in sitting down and really teaching these skills. That's really going to benefit these kids so they can read.

In practice, Winnie engaged students in the activities she characterized as basic skills. She called groups of six to eight students to the rug where she followed a constant agenda that included a broad range of skills. She reviewed picture cards that represented specific letters and sounds; students would identify the picture, then isolate and repeat the initial sound several times. Next, Winnie dictated a sentence to the students that incorporated words for which they were held responsible. Students then wrote it as many times as possible in one minute. After orally verifying the sentence with the students, she directed them to write it again, as many times as possible in one minute. Finally, the group read a story from the text. Winnie provided some introductory comments – previewing events and vocabulary, eliciting students' responses about experiences that were similar to those in the story, or doing a picture walk. She then had the students read chorally, or in round robin fashion – going around the circle, calling on one

student at a time. Winnie concluded the lessons by asking comprehension questions, which included literal as well as inferential understanding.

Meanwhile, other students seated at their desks were assigned to complete morning seatwork that included items copied from the board, spelling work of some sort, and worksheets. A parent volunteer participated daily; she served as the students' reference when Winnie was with a reading group. Also observed during small groups, she referred students to the parent volunteer when she worked with small groups, answered phone calls, addressed students' off-task behaviors, and sometimes conversed with the parent volunteer during that time.

Large group instruction. Large group instruction occurred in kindergarten classes daily, according to the posted schedules. The first observations of Meg and Dora happened during their morning routine. At the primary level, the morning routine provides an opportunity for students to practice and apply skills they are developing in language, reading, mathematics, as well as other content areas. The observation recounted below of Meg's morning routine represents the routine's primary activities.

The first observation of Meg's class occurred during morning routine. Students were seated on the carpet, the teacher in a chair with a blank chart tablet. She reviewed the day, date, month, year with the students while writing that information on the chart. Students then contributed ideas for the morning message, which the teacher recorded and then class read as a group. A student

brought the calendar up-to-date by adding a number card. As a group, the class recited the day, and date. Students counted how many days had passed in the month. They reviewed "Yesterday was___" "Today is ___" and "Tomorrow is ___." Pencils and sticks were used to represent the ones and tens as students determined how many days they had been in school, using a hundreds chart. Students sung songs based upon familiar tunes and content-area themes while the teacher pointed to each word, demonstrating one to one correspondence. A story was read using a big book, the teacher asked the students questions, and facilitated discussion. Finally, an overview of the day's learning centers concluded the instructional block.

Similarly, the first observation of Dora's kindergarten class occurred during large group instruction. The students were seated on the rug, gathered around the teacher. After reminding them of behavioral expectations – "Listening, learning position," Dora recalled a previous class discussion about Texas. She invited the students to share points they remembered. The class revisited Texas on a United States map and Austin on a state map. Dora then led the students on a picture walk through a fiction book about cowboys. Finally, she read the story aloud, asking and answering questions along the way, including closed and open-ended questions. Through the course of the lesson, every child contributed an answer, observation, or question.

One on one instruction. Some instruction was observed that defied usual categorization as group or center based. For example, during the first observation of Nan's first grade class at Walker, neither center, small, nor large group instruction was observed. However, Nan met individually with students where she provided specifc cues and instruction. Students were at their desks working on an activity in which they were to generate a list of people, places, and things with a partner, then illustrate each item. Nan worked at her desk, from there fielding questions or inviting students to join her. The teaching assistant, Mr. Boykin, spoke to her privately. Soon thereafter, Nan asked Asa to bring his paper and speak with her. By the large white board, where the words person, place, and thing were written, she stood with Asa and reviewed the concepts, generating examples, then cuing him to successfully name examples.

During the weeks of the study, Nan was not observed providing explicit reading instruction in. She grouped students for spelling, identifying some students as "second grade spellers," others as "first grade spellers" and the least advanced spellers as "Cate's group," then provided assignments. Asked about her instruction, Nan averred that the "class can't handle centers," however, she later stated that "they have a lot of center activities." When observing in the class, I asked her to show me the centers. Nan pointed to a list on the wall and identified that as the spelling center, explaining that she was still developing others.

During observations, Nan either worked at her desk, gave spelling tests, tested students, or met with individual students about behavior or academics while others worked at their desks in pairs or individually on assigned workbook pages or board work. In response to a query regarding the individual meetings versus large or small group activities, Nan responded that,

> They had assignments from last week. They've been playing around and hadn't been doing their work. So, I just have them bring it to me, and they never know when I'm going to take it up and when I'm not.

About the worksheets students undertook, she revealed that she used those to supplement instruction for things that she "[didn't] think [she'll] going to hit … or don't think [she'll] cover. … And some are review."

Computer assisted literacy instruction. Computers were located in all classrooms. However, their use was not observed in Winnie's class, and only once in Nan's where it served as a reward for a reportedly high functioning student. In the kindergarten classes, educational games were loaded on the machines, but students did not consistently demonstrate understanding of or attention to the activities, often surfing through available software. Teachers were not observed providing explicit instruction or monitoring on the use of the hardware or software, even in classes where the computers were part of the daily center rotations.

Teachers' instructional behaviors and their comments following the observations provoked my interest in a greater understanding of how they perceived themselves. As I reviewed the debriefings, I found patterns in the language used, where proactive included things like "I need to" or "it's my responsibility," and reactive "I can't" or "they can't." Still, these teachers spoke very personally and passionately about what their work. After reviewing perceptions and classroom practices, the time arrived to ask the teachers directly, "What factors determine your decisions for literacy instruction?"

 sons for Decisions about Literacy Instruction

The second interview opened with the question "What factors influence your decision making for literacy instruction?" Follow-up probes included: "How do those decisions differ for kids who are struggling with literacy?" "How do those decisions vary based upon CLD characteristics?" "How do those decisions vary based upon SES?" and "How do those decisions differ based upon disability/ability?"

Overall, teachers identified students' needs as the primary force behind their decisions, though for several, their first utterance was acknowledgement of the ubiquitous role of school's assessment mandates. In addition, they expressed a "whatever it takes" approach to assure that students obtain the necessary skills. Structured first by school and grade, then by individual, the following discussion includes teachers' remarks about their decisions for literacy instruction.

Teachers appear very aware of the presence of testing For example, the first response received for "What factors influence your decision making for literacy instruction?" from all of the teachers at Hope Elementary pointed to assessment. Meg replied, "TEKS. What it says we should be teaching. Format? [The adopted reading series] as far as introduction of phonics."

Notably, however, she followed up her remarks with comments about students' needs. Meg said that she provided "review if students seem like they have specific need in some area, but otherwise follow routine," noting the routine developed first through her work with her mentor teacher, then through work with the literacy specialist who previously worked with the campus, and finally through her own, self-directed professional development. The other kindergarten teacher Dora responded more simply yet included student considerations in her immediate reply. She named, "District guidelines, IPGs, and then maturity level of my kids."

Like Dora, Oma identified directives from the school system. She stated, "The school tells me [what to cover via] IPGs." Oma bemoaned the imposition of some district guidelines:

> A person could literally follow the IPG, I guess, and do the teaching. I … just feel that way sometimes. You know when they literally tell you what to teach, the creativity is flying out the window - that sort of thing. I mean the bureaucracy has that down.

However, Oma lauded the local campus for facilitating flexibility within district parameters; she explained,

> Now, of course, we have freedom at this school. If I, if we are hitting those things that we need to do, we do it any way we want to. And I'm sure that, surely nobody really has to really follow what they say exactly. And I'm, I mean we have to hit those skills, and you know, yes, the vocabulary, whatever, but we have freedom to do it in whatever way that we can.

Cara observed that she used several assessments to inform her decision-making, first those passed from the kindergarten teacher, which included the DRA and TPRI, then her own assessments such as word lists and observation. She contrasted those initial assessments used for preliminary grouping with her own reassessments after the second week of school. Cara described the assessments occurring approximately:

> two weeks into school. We'll start out and just try to find out what the kids know, and what they need to know and don't know. And then we assess them - handwriting skills, the alphabet - if they don't know that- just anything that we need to - to reading. Because some come in reading and you just want to do that right away to see where they are and how high their levels are.

Conversely, the teachers at Walker first identified students' level of functioning as the determinant of their instructional decisions. They reported students' needs as the primary factor when planning instruction. For example, Nan stated, "At the beginning, what I have." She continued,

> What the group of kids that I have come in with, and what they come in lacking. Here, it seems to be, and looks like it's gonna be the same thing next year from what I'm hearing from down below, they are coming in without a strong letter, letter recognition, or letter sound recognition. Um, if I come in, again, top heavy with that...

Recounting students' dearth of understanding reading related tasks, Nan then argued that:

> The very first thing that they have to do before they can do anything is they have to know the letters of the alphabet and they have to know what sounds they make because otherwise, it doesn't look like anything. They have no idea. They don't have any idea that they mean anything, that they're letters, that.. I understand that there are issues with people coming in without knowing that these are the letters in my name. So for the majority, that would be where you'd start off.

Hilary summarized her decision making influences as "Early and ongoing assessment, providing experimentation and support throughout the years through the curriculum assessments [including] teacher created [measures, as well as the]

DRA and TPRI," which she inaccurately identified as the "Texas Primary Reading Initiative." Like Hilary, Sue mentioned assessment, "The biggest thing – informal assessment, are just observation and what I see are the needs of the kids." Winnie professed, "Number one is the children and the different styles that they come with. I have to look to the needs of the children.

Teachers from both schools identified ready answers about how they made decisions in general. Hope teachers identified assessments as a factor behind their instructional decisions, but ultimately they emphasized consideration of students' levels of functioning. Walker teachers first identified students as the main determinant of their instructional decisions. The following describes individuals' responses to the probes about teachers' decisions for literacy instruction.

Decisions and Students' Perceived Characteristics

Each teacher had an opportunity to speak at length about differences and the perceived influence of such. Length and focus vary, just as did the participants' degrees of loquacity. Some answers suggest a conflation of meaning around the terms struggling, CLD, SES, and disability.

Hilary, Kindergarten at Walker. Hilary first answered the question about CLD with her own observations about differences that she identified between Hispanic and African American families. She disclosed, "One of the things that I wondered about is how much home environment I seem to see is involved with

the Hispanic population versus the African American population." Hilary then spoke at length about what she noticed, including:

> And what I find, I guess, overall is the Hispanic population is more supportive of their children, more um, focused, and pride a lot on education and their children's education. Of course, you have the extremes of both of those. So I think culturally, when I ask why do you think that there's more involvement in the home, why is it that these children seem to be more focused?

She continued to discuss differences she perceived between Hispanic and African American families, identifying the former as "paternal" and the latter

> maternally based…I don't see a lot of men involved in their children's education, or in their life on a daily basis. So I notice that there's not a lot of, not broken families, they're just different types of families.

When asked how these remarks related to CLD characteristics and instruction, Hilary continued,

> I try to incorporate a lot of African American culture into what we're teaching, what I'm teaching. … During African American history month, we do a lot of studying of African American people in the community locally, as well as nationally. I could probably do more. Part of that is my own limited knowledge, which is, in a lot of ways, a lot more than a lot of other people.

Hilary spoke extensively about purposefully seeking out such populations as highlighted below.

> I would probably say that has changed over the years with my maturity and my experience with teaching, because I have always been in a very low socioeconomic situation. … I feel like I love what I do, I'm good at what I do. And those types of environments, those types of children really need people like that to teach. … I seek them out because I feel like I have a contribution that I would like to make. And because I seek those out, and because I taught in those predominantly most of my teaching, you find that it's important to know and to recognize that those children that come out of that environment have a whole totally perspective than what I had and kids growing up in my town might have.

When asked to clarify how perspectives varied between her and the students she now teaches, Hilary recounted a story of a little boy whose shoes hurt his feet, so he cried when coming to school. She told of buying him new shoes, and explained:

> I feel like I learn from them so much…. He didn't have any problems from that point. So I felt like, not too many other teachers would have done that. …I didn't tell the mother because that wasn't important. I just got him shoes and that was fine. And he may have told her later on, I don't know. But I didn't want [the] mom to feel embarrassed. But, um, I think that

there are so many stories that I have, year after year, about how I perceive socioeconomic - based situations.

Hilary also spoke of consulting with others she perceived as more knowledgeable than she with respect to students' needs:

> Sometimes I go to other older African American women and colleagues to I ask them if this is the appropriate thing to do, or what do you think about my doing this. And that was always a good help; that was always very important. And I'm glad that I did that, I'm glad that I got help. Because sometimes I found out from that population because I think that there's such a different perception of life that I didn't want to feel like I was the one being the know-it-all, or [whatever.] So I think that that kind of socioeconomic based environment, and I'm very sensitive to, or try to be as possible, as to where the kids are coming from or where they may be.

She summarized her remarks about SES by discussing the relationship between what she characterized as "basic needs" and students' ability to learn. Hilary concluded,

> For example, one of the basic needs of a child, or a human being, and if the child has not had enough sleep and hasn't had food, and doesn't feel safe, well then they're not going to care anything about learning. And I think that's something that I really try to focus a lot on, and realize that those kids are dealing with a lot of things, everyday, that I don't have to

> deal with. But yet, those are their realities and they come to school with those worries and concerns and lack of, and uh, so I guess that I just try to help out any way I can - to get that kid focused on his learning, or her learning.

With respect to student with disabilities, Hilary expressed pleasure in integrating students from Early Childhood classes with her general education class. She professed,

> I think that it's important for my kids and for the child, the children that are coming from other situations. These are, you know there are lots of different kinds of people out there and we can learn from each other and you know, the world is a very diverse place, for them more so than when I was growing up.

Hilary also expressed concern regarding academically related tasks, and addressing possible challenges that she characterized as disability.

> I think that when we look at children today, we see a lot of what maybe in later grades we determine is dyslexia, because they're writing letters and numbers backwards. Sometimes you even have children starting from the left and move to the right [sic].

Hilary then described a particular incident with a student who wrote backwards. She recounted:

> And I had a child this past year, this current year, who would do that, start from the left, right and move to the left. And the letters were reversed, but they were written in the right order, just faced on the wrong end. And when I talk to the student I model writing from left to right. And I did that want that child to feel they had written it wrong, in terms of they got the letters in the right order, but I was wanting them to understand in terms of, to understand they were starting on the wrong side of the paper. So, instead of saying, "Oh no, no, no! You did it wrong!" or "Let's do it this other way," I felt like I wanted to adapt what the child had already written. And so we worked it letter by letter. We talked about reversing. I don't think that she realized that she was really doing that. And we rewrote it from left to right with the letters uh, written the correct way as well.

Hilary then discussed the dyslexia training in which she participated, “I took a dyslexia workshop last year during last summer. And they were talking about [mirror writing], and that particular class really helped me to look at early dyslexia or what may be early dyslexia.”

Sue, kindergarten, Walker. Regarding struggling readers, Sue commented, “it’s not a big consideration [when planning] because I know that I can pull them out [to work individually.]” Similarly, she characterized CLD status as having little influence upon her instruction. Sue stated, “It hasn’t really affected my planning,” noting that the adopted curriculum has “good multicultural [sic].”

Sue disavowed any notice of differences due to dialect:

> I haven't noticed. It could be that I've been teaching with this [population] the whole time, but it's nothing that I've noticed, nothing that I've been concerned with. There are, there have been times in previous years that I've noticed the problem, it's not necessarily a problem, it's just the way they talk.

However, when probed further, “If you notice somebody using dialect, what do you do with respect to instruction?” Sue replied,

> It depends on what it is. Like the word "ain't" bothers me, so yeah, I would correct that. But there are other things, like "gonna,” which at this age, I'm not going to bother with. (laughs) So I guess I'm not very strict with that.

Sue dismissed any issues predicated SES, stating, “I’ve always worked with these kids.” In addition, she said,

> The biggest thing is who their partner is going to be, where they're going to be sitting. I try to get them, obviously, in close proximity to me where they don't have any distractions when or if they're looking at me.

Regarding the role of selective grouping for students with disabilities, Sue elaborated,

> And I have, usually always have them partnered up with somebody that will have, is a very good teacher that can help them, keep an eye on them, without me having to say that. Usually at the beginning of the year, that's

> one thing that I'm looking for - how are they getting along? Who's helping who? … and so then that kinda guides me to know with who I need to place with who[sic].

Winnie, first grade, Walker. Winnie explained, "Well [my plans and instruction] don't vary [due to CLD status] because to me, all children, they're all alike in some way, some of them are going to have experiences, some of them are not, and I try to teach [the] whole group."

In addition, Winnie asserted that she did not consider SES. Asked "What influence does SES have on your decisions for literacy instruction?" she stated

> The bottom line is my decisions are influenced by I have to make sure that I'm serving the child in the best way that I know how. And uh, once I've, I work with that child, I know the need of that child, I'll do whatever I can to make sure I'm reaching that child, opening up doors for him to learn. Making sure that I'm empowering that child with the skills he's going to need to be successful.

Continuing, Winnie opined

> If they would let teachers do their job and teach, I think that we would have much more success. But considering all the test-taking skills and everybody focusing on the TAAS test, we forget about the kids, and the basic things that they really need. If we could just get back to the basics,

and that's teaching not just teaching the test, we can, we can have much more success. So, I'm going to make sure that I reach the child.

Winnie focused more upon her relationship with the parents and the reciprocal relationship they must have to facilitate success for students with disabilities. She stated:

> I work closely with the parent. I include them in everything. I don't make a decision unless I sit down and talk with the parent and let them know, this is you know, when a child comes in, this is where we would like for him to be, but since he's not there, I need your help in getting this child to where he should be. I'm going to do this in the classroom, I need for you to do thus and thus at home to help reinforce what I'm doing so we can work together and making this work for this child.

Nan, first grade, Walker. In the context of struggling literacy learners, Nan addressed the varied levels present in her class. As an anecdote, she recounted students' understanding of a Dr. Seuss unit:

> They'll tell me, "Oh, he's that white guy." I mean, that's what they get out of it: oh, he's white and he's dead and he wrote about the cat. You know? The ones that are a little bit further along, "Oh, he wrote a whole bunch of these books and he, he was, he had a different name. And he wrote under a different name." They don't remember that it's called a pen name … for the majority … it's just not [meaningful].

Nan responded to the question “How do your decisions for instruction vary based upon cultural and linguistic differences?” by speaking at great length about her concerns regarding dialect in school. She asserted:

> The reason that I have the issue with it is because when you're struggling to begin with, and you're hearing it wrong, and you're seeing it wrong, you're going to use it wrong. And, once you --- I feel like it's more appropriate when you're in third grade than it is in first grade. Once you know what it's supposed to look like, and it's supposed to sound like, then you can start experimenting with the cultural way that you might say a word, rather than introducing it that way at first and saying you know, and letting them see that and thinking that's how it's supposed to be. Because if they see that in the book, that's how it's supposed to be at first grade! It's supposed to be like that because it's in the book. Well, yeah but, and you know, they don't quite understand that it's written, you know, really for their culture. They don't quite get that.

Nan continued talking about dialect, noting that some higher functioning students recognize dialect in literature and can distinguish it from “how it’s supposed to be. She especially focused her views of the potential impact dialect use in the classroom would have on a student with significant academic delays – Kayla, whose home life was reportedly chaotic.

> If, if she saw it like that all the time? I know that she's hearing it like that all the item at home that would be how she writes. And, God love ya, you write something like that, it gets to be a habit, and then it's hard to break, and then …, she maybe loses opportunities.

Tipping her head towards another classroom where the teacher was African American, Nan continued, "And who knows who she's going to have next. You know? So, I have a real issue with those. I don't like to, I don't like to bring them in often."

Responding to the CLD question still, Nan bemoaned students' unfamiliarity with some of the books she considered appropriate such as Cinderella, but acknowledged that she was unfamiliar with Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters, a book with a similar story line but from a different culture.

> I don't have that one…They know what a princess is, but they don't give me, they don't have a background knowledge. They don't know who those characters --- it's not like when we grew up. I couldn't read Peter Pan to them and they have any idea, you know. There's no recognition. Sesame Street, Barney - they don't even really like Frog and Toad.

When asked about how SES influences her instructional decisions, Nan named several deficits she associated with low SES. She observed:

> Um, some of them have never seen a book. They don't get read to. They don't know how to behave. They don't, you know, they don't, they can't

> relate to it on the same, on the same level as somebody whose parents work with them. And I've noticed the ones that are kinda a little bit more needy are the ones where the families are a little bit more needy. You know, the parents aren't home for them. You know? So reading is not a priority

Nan explained the accompanying challenges she perceives and how she addresses some of those below.

> So for them, more fun books, more controlled vocabulary books because they don't have the vocabulary, they don't have the same words, even in that lower vocabulary that the other children have, its' not really --- so I have the, I have a way out. Sometimes I read a one, for the low, and the next time I read one for the high. Sometimes I read one where they can have puppets and act it out, and sometimes, you know.

In further response to the query regarding SES, Nan described how she more fully differentiated instruction:

> Sometimes we'll do one where you just sit quietly and think about what it means. Sometimes we'll do a picture walk because some of them really like to do a picture walk! And some of them don't have time for picture walk. I don't want you to do the picture walk I want you to read me the story; let's get on with it! You know? So, you kinda have to do one for you, do one for you another time.

Nan, a former special education teacher asserted that she modifies as much as possible when she notices, “there's a need beyond what there should normally be required.” Nan further described her strategies to facilitate support. She reported arranging for:

> Parent conferencing. Support at home, if I can get it. And if it's severe enough that I think that it's going to be an issue, usually that takes me about nine weeks to try to, to figure out if there's really going to be a problem, start talking to them about taking the next step. Let's screen them, let's find out - see if there's a vision problem, see if there's a hearing problem, let's see what's going on. So, that will drive too, what I do. Some of them can't handle as much. Some of them don't, they're not able to go on as quickly. So that will, that will influence what, what I do and how I do it.

Meg, kindergarten, Hope .Engagement was critical to Meg for students who struggled with literacy because she observed that was an operative means of garnering any new knowledge. She added, “I’ll just change [strategies] according to what they can do,” yet insisted that expectations and content remain constant.

Meg hesitated to respond to the question regarding CLD status. After listening to it, she replied, “The right answer might be yes, but,” she paused, “No.” Meg asserted that she is “very sensitive as far as where the kids are coming from [with respect to ranges of experience], but I don’t change those things

because [a student is] ESL or African American. I feel like I think about things that will be pertinent." Meg's response suggested greater attention to the issue. Regarding dialect, she replied,

> That as far as, and linguistically, I guess, I do correct a lot of grammar, if you want to say that. As far as culturally, you know slang based on culture you know, just like the typical uh, leaving off the endings of words, and word order and the structure of sentences, that type of thing?

Meg also described talking with students about the pragmatics of language usage. She said,

> I also explain how it's ok to talk like this at home or on the side. And I'll say, "Hey girl, I'm not goin' here," or "I ain't gonna do this." And I'll talk kinda loosely. But at school and at work, we need to say complete sentences so we can be really understood, and people will really know what we're trying to say.

Regarding SES status, Meg asseverated,

> I feel like I take it into consideration a lot as far as where the kids are coming from and what they've been exposed to and what they probably have seen and have not seen. So, as far as, I guess, I feel like I'm very sensitive to the fact that they've, they haven't seen a lot of books, and of the world. They haven't been taken to the zoo. They haven't had a lot of

> experiences that maybe a lot of other people would just assume that a five year old would have

She responded to the query about the role of disabilities in her instruction decision-making stating, “I really address it by just trying to help those kids with whatever it is.” When asked to elaborate, she noted the great scope of disabilities teachers address, starting with basic needs of rest and food.

> If it seems like they're not getting enough rest, I'll send a note home always - saying about how important it is for your kids to have enough sleep and if the kid continues to fall asleep all the time then I'll call and say, and you can just ask them - are they sleeping in the living room, or they're gone all night, or the TV, whatever. I'll just follow up, I talk to the parents --- or breakfast, you know. You get a lot of kids coming in with having not eaten. And if they're on free or reduced, all you gotta do is get here before 7:30. There's just no reason for a child to come in without food when there's all this help. So, I just kinda, you know, I kinda call them on all these things - in a nice way! Trying to say that this is what you need, and your kids can't learn under these conditions.

Meg continued, talking about hygiene, then moved to concerns regarding emotional health.

> But emotionally? There's a lot anger and a lot of problems, and had a lot of conferences, you know? More than you're just supposed to have for

> academic. Had conferences with the principal, and IMPACT meetings about trying to get [Jared] help, you know and he didn't qualify. And anyway, just trying to be aware and open to trying to solve whatever problem that they might have - well, not solve, but ...aid them in some way so that they can be here and be a participant just like somebody else that came here ready to go, you know?

Meg emphasized the need to facilitate students' preparedness for learning, as their teacher, and by providing information to families.

> So I feel like a lot of it's just, just trying to get them to the starting place before I really teach them, and.. uh, I made some new behavioral plans/ charts for three students because they were just having such a problem. So, they're earning their green [card], and it is a better way because they can see visually and all that. So, and disabilities - there, I don't know, I just -- got information. I just do different stuff. I sent stuff on the non-compliant and defiant child home to [students]' moms because that's all that is. And I didn't send it to [another student]'s mom because she wouldn't have, wouldn't have read it. I mean, I know that sounds sad, but she doesn't read anything in her folder. So I could save and just not copy it.

In addition, Meg spoke of trying to secure special education sources for students. For example, she related:

> I tried to get [Marquis] into speech, or OT, or something! He just hasn't been in school enough days, so they say that he hasn't had the opportunity to learn, which I understand. But, just stay on it. Staying on the parents you know, that's it.

Dora, kindergarten, Hope. Dora spoke about adjustments in pacing for students who struggled with literacy, also noting increased one to one instruction. Dora also interpreted the question regarding CLD status strictly in terms of language, observing, “I only have one [predominantly Spanish speaker] this year and I try to explain things more slowly.” She asserted that dialect was not a significant issue. briefly stating, “[Dialect]'s not a real big issue to me, you know. I'm basically, if somebody says 'dat' for that, and I'll just repeat it as 'that' and go on, you know?”

Noting she also provided materials when needed for her low SES students, Dora specifically stated,

> Well, sometimes if I realize that they don't have materials, I'll try to provide them with more materials. You know- crayons, markers, paper, notebooks. (…) [The instruction varies] a little bit - maybe I'll explain things to another level - if they don't understand what a swing set is because they don't have a swing set. So, I'll use that, I'll break it down even further if I see that they don't understand.

Dora immediately addressed physical disabilities in response to the question regarding disability. She recalled:

> Well, just having to physically move the room around a little bit, if I had somebody wheelchair impaired, or whatever. I've had wheelchair impaired, walkers, and all that, so just basically moving things around, having them maybe sit in a chair so they don't have as much trouble getting up off the rug. But this year, I don't have anybody.

Asked, “What about high incidence things such as emotional disturbance or learning disabilities?” Dora replied,

> I do kinda try to gauge how that person is doing that day and try to modify the situation for him. If I see that somebody is really having a rough day, maybe we won't stir things up as much as we usually would, [laughs] you know. Like ABC Disco - oh that's sends them! It's really fun you know, but when you can see that somebody's already wound a little tightly, "Oh, maybe we'll not do that today" and try to find a little calmer thing.

Cara, first grade, Hope. Although Cara claimed her instruction “doesn’t differ that much for students who she considers struggling, she proceeded to list modifications she provided, such as opportunities for practice, time adjustments, assignment size changes, and more individualized work assignments. When asked about CLD students, Cara stated, “They’re just kids to me,” then spoke about

how she attempts to talk with her ESL students more “to enhance their English.” About dialect in her class, Cara stated:

> It's not a lot, but it is some. A lot of it's slang and I try to, try to avoid trying to correct everything, but I do try to say it right so they will hear it more than one time, and then the kids will say it right. (…)They get the message that they can't just talk any kind of way, they've got to try and use the right language, and try to be able to say the words as best they can.

Confirming that she actively addressed the use of dialect as well as modeling academic English, Cara related:

> And I do try to correct them, we try to say the words together. If we're doing a group of words, we'll try to enunciate the words really good so they can understand them. Some of them, you know like my bilingual kids that are transferring from Spanish to English cannot hear some of the sounds sometimes, and cannot make the sounds so good.

In addition, Cara recounted that the students would correct each other’s speech. She explained,

> They will tell them, "No, that's not how you say that." And sometimes I leave it. And then sometimes I'll catch them bugging another kid, so I'll say, "No, we're not going to do it that way. Let's think about what we're doing." And I'll say, Let's say it this way, and if I need to correct them, let me do it. I just call 'um, and let me do it. Don't bother them."

Unlike any of the other teachers, Cara talked about her personal experiences with dialect, noting the difficulties it presented to her.

> That dialect, it's really hard. It's even hard to read, because I have this book that's called Floxie and the Fox; I had to pull my tape out! [laughter] I mean, I grew up in that era, but my grandparents did talk kinda strange, but they didn't have those words, ya know? And so they didn't. But I grew up in the South, not the Deep South. As you go further along, you pick up a lot of it.

Cara addressed the need to provide information in more discrete parts, and to scaffold knowledge when students do not have prior experiences that will facilitate understanding, characteristics that sometimes accompany students from low SES. She said:

> I think that any kid can learn, but it depends upon how/what you're teaching them because they can focus, they can pick up things, but when you give them really big chores to do, it's hard for them to do it so you have to give it in bits and pieces.

Regarding students with special education labels, she talked about the importance of including all students in class activities.

> Well, everybody is included. There is no exclusion in my classroom. Everybody is taught on the same level, except that I downsize for some of the kids that can't work as fast as the others. I would give them longer

> periods of time to do something. Not like a whole day, but like, if we have 30 minutes, and that kid can't finish in 30, then I say, ok, then you can have another 10 or 15 minutes. Then if we don't do it then, I'll say when we get back, you can finish it up. (…) So those kids who have a disability in the classroom work on their functional levels.

Notably, only Cara, out of all the participants, mentioned students' Individualized Education Plan as directing her instructional decisions. She commented,

> Like if they're special ed kids, they have an IEP, and I have to make sure that I work towards that, and give them extra time for that. And when they leave out of my classroom to go in there, they work more on those skills, so they're not missing out on anything.

Oma, first grade, Hope. Oma noted, "I give the ones who are struggling more information to complete their work," describing models and other assistance she gives the students. Regarding issues around CLD status, Oma observed that she could speak "more easily about linguistic" diversity than cultural diversity. She stated outright that she "should be more reflective on race. These children do not have the same values that necessarily I have for my children, [but I treat] all my children as equal." Oma, talked explicitly about speech she associated with African American dialect.

> I find my African American children leave off an s or they make, they pronounce things differently, or - I do talk to them about we need to learn

> standard English. You know, when you go out for a job when you get older they would like to see you use standard English, when you interview, this sort of thing, standard English is the, in the broad sense, what we need to do, and how we, well I don't know what I'm speaking here! [laughs] But we're supposed to use Standard English in our society.

She noted however, that she does not correct students who read using dialect.

> But I do not [correct them] as they are reading. [If] they read in their dialect, [or] they switch the tone to the word, I do not really count that as [an error], because you know, they're still getting the content. Right, as long as the content is not being changed and the comprehension is there, then I'm not real upset if they leave off an end [sic].

She further explained that she considers dialect during assessments also, but expressed concern about the consequences of such.

> You know, I'm not going to count it wrong, or it's just like they were doing the DRA. I didn't, they didn't pronounce the word Michael correctly. It's somebody's name for crying out loud! Or[if]we were reading a Hispanic story and it was mama and papa, and you know, if they knew it was to do with mama, but they'd say "mother." So what? So, I did not, but [low whisper] this is probably for your ears [back to normal tone] only because this my reading test --- yeah, and those kinds of things play in. I am aware

of it. I'm not going to penalize a child because that they're dialect, their home, or their native dialect is different than the standard English. Sorry

Regarding students from low SES, Oma noted that if a child was unable to pay the entire cost of a field trip, she contributed the difference. She reported that some students vocalized their concerns about money for trips, and she responded:

> Bring what you can. Don't worry about it, just ask them to send what they can. And some do not --- because if you know there are very poor people who are doing the right thing. Well, I say they're doing the right thing - they're priorities for education are high.

Oma targeted her efforts to provide students with a safe learning environment for all students, but especially those with disabilities. She related a story about a student with a sever speech impairment who eventually was able to lead the Pledge of Allegiance during school wide morning announcements. Oma averred, "I guess that really I try to have an atmosphere for a child like that that is risk free, and you know, where he feels comfortable." She also cited the support that she received from specialized personnel. Oma shared,

> I work with those [special education] teachers [and therapists] on what they're doing, and … you know, they're specialists. And they give me ideas. You know, like I might use a highlighter a lot of the time for him, and we'll copy over the words. He'll dictate to me, and copy over what I've written in highlighter. Work with him occupationally.

For readers struggling with literacy. One probing stions sought to determine “How do those decisions [for literacy instruction] differ for kids who are struggling with literacy?” Teachers responded differently, some naming a single intervention, others listing possible modifications. Most of the teachers from Walker identified increased one on one instruction for struggling students. Alternatively, teachers from Hope adjusted to their instruction with respect to pacing and scaffolding.

Role of cultural and linguistic diversity in decisions. When asked, “How do those decisions [for literacy instruction] vary based upon CLD characteristics?” many of the teachers reported cultural and linguistic diversity did not play a role in their instructional decisions. Walker’s Winnie and Sue reported shared similar views that CLD status does not influence their instruction. Some teachers focused on language differences when asked about instruction for CLD students.

Role of language. A few teachers averred that neither cultural nor linguistic factors swayed them. Several teachers focused on language and usage only, when asked about the influence of CLD characteristics on their decision-making for literacy instruction. One white teacher expressed concern about her limited reflectivity on the issue of race and ethnicity; another spoke quickly about differences she observed between groups and required redirection to the target

question. Most frequently, teachers spoke of content in curricular materials as the manner in which they addressed CLD characteristics during instruction.

Some teachers responded to the question about CLD characteristics by discussing dialect. When asked, "What role does dialect have in your decision-making for literacy instruction?" they articulated a variety of responses, ranging from none to extensive concerns regarding the use of dialect in reading materials.

Role of SES in decisions for literacy instruction. In response to the question, "How do those decisions [for literacy instruction] vary based upon SES?" most teachers indicated an awareness of the potential role SES played in students' experiences and opportunities. However, translation of awareness to action appeared inconsistent. Some teachers spoke of students' limited opportunities and how they as teachers attempted to ameliorate consequent differences. Others asserted that SES does not enter into their instructional decision-making. Another spoke only of limited opportunities.

Role of disability in decisions for literacy instruction. Teachers' responses to "How do those decisions [for literacy instruction] differ based upon disability/ability?" suggested varied background knowledge and experience with teaching students with disabilities. Most teachers reported attempting to provide adequate supports for individuals, one teacher asserted that she individualized for everyone.

In summary, the participants presented a broad range of understanding about literacy, as well as the roles of difficulty learning, SES, dialect, CLD status, and disability, in their decision making for literacy instruction.

Students' Reading Records

Access issues. Before classroom observations began, teachers received letters to send home with the students requesting permission to review individual cumulative folders and reading records. The intended purpose of the record review was to provide understanding of the levels on which students were functioning academically, based upon the common measures of the Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and to investigate the use of reading records to monitor students' progress systematically.

District policy requires kindergarten teachers to administer both assessments in January and April. First grade must test using the TPRI and DRA in August/September, January, and April (C. Edwards, personal correspondence, October 20, 2003). Consequently, results should be in students' folders, a compilation of outcomes part of the teachers' class records. However, limited access precluded collection of all the requested information. As a result, the following discussion will present levels of achievement as reported by available DRA scores.

Permission. Thirty of the thirty-seven kindergarten students from Walker Elementary returned permission slips. Of those, more than half (n=24) granted permission for record review, thus providing access to their cumulative folders. Kindergarten teachers provided time and access to folders for review, as well as compilations of class DRA results.

However, the first grade classes at Walker returned ten permission slips, out of forty-four students. Of those, only six granted permission for record review. Coordinating time to review students' folders proved impossible. Those teachers did not provide class compilations. Nan did provide the DRA scores from memory for the six students' whose caregivers granted access by writing the scores on a list provided. She administered the test in early March, instead of January; therefore, the scores could not be used to compare with first grade classes in Hope. Winnie provided no assessment information, thereby precluding any comparisons of her students.

First grade teachers at Hope were still testing as well, and could not provide current levels for all of the students. However, they provided class compilations, which included September and January scores. Similarly, the kindergarten teachers at Hope had not completed their assessments, but shared compilations from January.

DRA scores .In January, the expected DRA score for kindergarten is a two or above. (See Appendix for Reading Levels) Of the kindergarten students at

Walker, 72% were below the anticipated level, 28% on or above the expected score. At Hope, 30% of the kindergarten students were below a DRA level two, 69% on or above that.

In January, the expected DRA score for first grade is 14 or above. No January scores were available from Walker Elementary. Of the first graders in Oma's class who returned their permission slips, 28% were on or above level, another 28% were on level 12, and therefore considered within range. The rest were significantly below the expected level. Sixty-three percent of the sixteen first graders in Cara's class were on or above the expected level.

Reading records provided some additional insight into current achievement level disparities between kindergartners at Walker and Hope. Even within Hope's first grade classes, disparities existed regarding the proportion of students reading on the expected level.

Summary

To determine teachers' explanations for their decisions regarding literacy instruction, records were kept and analyzed from conversations, interviews, drawings, and instruction. Data coalesced around themes of literacy understandings, and teachers' perspectives. Analysis and discussion follow.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to learn how kindergarten and first grade teachers in high CLD, low SES schools explained their decision-making for literacy instruction. Participants included eight teachers in two urban schools. Data sources included classroom observations, post-observation debriefings, semi-structured interviews, teacher demographic surveys, descriptive self-portraits, and record reviews. Although all teachers professed concern for educating their CLD students, the manifestation of such varied significantly. Teachers' observed competence and effectiveness in literacy instruction appear to exist in three dimensions: understandings of literacy, perceptions of teaching, perceptions of students. The following discussion addresses: dimensions of excellence, characteristics of competence, contexts and competency. The chapter concludes with implications for practice, study limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Dimensions of Excellence

Teachers' Understandings of Literacy

Teachers demonstrated differing degrees of understanding and competence regarding literacy. The more competent teachers articulated clearly literacy's scope, including text and skills, yet extending connections to the world beyond print and school. These teachers utilized the language and strategies of

currently preferred instructional practices for literacy. They included critical components of explicit instruction in sound-symbol relationships and word analysis, tailored to students' present competencies – within students' zones of proximal development, yet urging them to enhance their knowledge and skills. Teachers provided opportunities for students to practice and apply skills in connected text, with peers, as well as in alternative settings. Using center-based activities, teachers facilitated moving between practice and application.

Less competent teachers demonstrated understandings of literacy that incorporated limited knowledge of language and strategies currently associated with preferred practices. Their definitions of literacy were generally text and skill bound. Descriptions included agreement about the presence of letters and sounds, but lacked cohesion across participants as a group, or even grade levels.

The language and concepts used to describe literacy varied between campuses. At Walker, teachers adhered to a text and skill based understanding of literacy, while at Hope, teachers extended their understanding of literacy to encompass text and the world beyond it. Teachers' understandings of literacy shape the manner and means through which instruction occurs. Understanding literacy as locked within school texts precludes teachers from accessing the students' real-world literacy skills, which may differ greatly from what teachers expect and recognize. Concurrently, to understand literacy as beyond simple

understanding of a word is more consistent with the higher level expectations promulgated in courses geared towards advanced studies.

Teachers who promote more in-depth and broader understandings of literacy may facilitate students' access to greater academic opportunities. Willis and Harris (2000) advocate:

> Engagement with fiction and nonfiction texts and aesthetic pleasure are the ultimate objectives of learning to read. Mechanistic views of literacy intrude upon this idealized image, often characterized by dichotomous pairings: Top- down versus bottom-up theories, phonemic awareness training versus phonics in context, and metacognitive strategies versus transactions with texts. Of course, these need not be mutually exclusive or warring opposites (p.75) [emphasis added].

In addition, research shows that the most effective literacy instruction requires balanced integration of high – quality reading and writing experiences and explicit instruction in literacy basic skills, those textually bound skills noted above (Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston, 1998). Therefore, teachers who define literacy as either grounded in basic skills or entirely literature-based fail to provide the most effective literacy instruction available to students. Thus, the teachers from Hope, who generally defined literacy broadly, may be characterized as more competent providers of effective literacy instruction than their colleagues at Walker who defined literacy narrowly.

Teachers' Perceptions about Teaching Literacy

Teachers' perceptions about teaching literacy gravitated towards either affective or professional foci. Concurrently, teachers spoke of their perceptions regarding their professional knowledge about teaching, which precipitated additional consideration of perceptions of their teaching efficacy. Notably, teachers' professed perceptions about teaching literacy differed, at times greatly, from observed practices.

Affective dimensions. The affective dimensions included three subsets of events or behaviors: those from which they gained gratification as reported by the phrases such as "I like" or "it feels good"; those for which teachers felt responsibility as suggested by language including "I need to"; and those that teachers desired for themselves or their students, as indicated by phrases such as "I want." Language the teachers use to describe their experiences reflects the very personal nature of the experience, from the frequent voice of first person to the hyperbolic "they love you and that's great!"

The teachers from both schools spoke about their desire to ensure students' success. They identified things for which they felt responsibility, as well as what they desired for their students. Teachers who demonstrated excellence spoke of addressing students' non- academic needs; however, those did not outweigh or preclude full attention to the business of learning. For example, Cara spoke compassionately about a child whose family struggled financially.

However, she also demonstrated very high expectations for him in class both academically and behaviorally. In fact, most of her students experienced challenges associated with low SES, but Cara expected appropriate behavior, complete engagement with learning, and high achievement. Another example, a student did not complete her homework, and explained the evening's events that hampered such. Neither scolding the child nor excusing her, Cara reassured the student that she would have opportunity to complete the work. Later that day the student was observed finishing her homework independently when she had free time in class. Cara's compassionate but firm and respectful high expectations proved effective in promoting the student's engagement with the required task.

Most teachers spoke about how they "love[d] these kids." However, some appeared to put greater importance on addressing short term needs that they identified as the neglected by parents than on the students' academic needs. Unlike Cara, these teachers neglected to balance short-term concerns with long-term consequences of inadequate schooling. Although they sometimes provided needed supports for students such as food and clothing, by neglecting the students' academic needs those teachers denied their students opportunity for success just as surely as the families they condemned for not providing adequate food or clothing.

Notably, affective dimensions appear closely linked with teachers' perceptions of efficacy as reported anecdotally, unlike their responses to

statements from the second interview. Those teachers who balanced concerns for short-term needs with those for long-term outcomes reported higher efficacy and greater professional knowledge than teachers who focused predominantly on non-academic issues. Additionally, teachers who integrated caring with high expectations facilitated greater time on task for the students and more active engagement by students during observations.

Professional knowledge and efficacy dimensions. All of the teachers reported professional knowledge garnered from teaching experience, and education such as pre-service or in-service development. Likewise, they all indicated high perceptions of personal self – efficacy, as determined using the Teacher Self Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). However, teachers sometimes indicated less confidence outside of specific questions and in less formal debriefings. For example, teachers asked me "if [they taught] enough." In addition, the information they shared sometimes indicated understandings of terms and concepts inconsistent with those promulgated in the literature (i.e., Winnie's understanding of literacy).

Teachers at Hope Elementary appeared to act somewhat consistently with literature regarding effective teaching, such as reported by Wharton-McDonald, Pressley and Hampston (1998).Wharton, et.al. conducted a study of effective urban first grade teachers, where students' end of year reading and writing achievement indicated effectiveness. In a sample of nine teachers, three were

identified as most effective. The highly effective teachers balanced instruction, including literature and skills. Conversely, less effective teachers focused on skills, literature, or a poor combination of the two. Teachers in the present study appeared to follow similar patterns to participants in the research of Wharton, et al.. Those from Hope Elementary, the exemplary school, balanced their literacy instruction by including skills and literature in relatively equal proportions. Meanwhile teachers from Walker, the acceptable school, generally restricted the scope of their instruction to a singular facet.

Wharton and colleagues (1998) found that effective teachers employed explicit instruction in decoding with meaningful, integrated reading and writing experiences that encouraged student learning. They scaffolded instruction for their students, thus facilitating learning. Effective teachers promoted students' self-monitoring, teaching students to evaluate their learning, work quality and use of work time. In addition, teachers taught students specific strategies used by good readers. These teachers possessed high expectations for their students; classroom management reflected that also. Lastly, the highly effective teachers clearly expressed the purposes of their activities and practices. All observed teachers from Hope Elementary displayed many of the behaviors Wharton, et al. identified as effective; observed teachers from Walker displayed few or none of the effective teaching behaviors.

Similarly, when evaluating school and classroom factors related to primary grade (e.g., K-3) reading achievement in fourteen schools, Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole (2000) also identified specific teacher behaviors associated with effective schools. Taylor and colleagues observed that significant teacher behaviors facilitated greater small group instruction time, students' time spent reading independently, students' time on task, and communication with families. Like the teachers in Wharton, et al., teachers who Taylor et al. considered most effective provided explicit instruction in decoding, opportunities for students to practice and apply their knowledge in meaningful settings, as well as specific strategies to optimize reading success, like the teachers from Hope.

Notably, Taylor, et al., observed that the study lacked culturally sensitive measures to assess students as well as observations focused upon the cultural responsiveness of instruction. They concluded, "The results of this study suggest that children in the primary grades make the greatest growth when a high proportion of their reading instruction is delivered through small, achievement-based groups, when their progress is monitored regularly, and when they have ample time to read and to learn needed skills and strategies" (Taylor, et al., 2000, Limitations section, ¶ 6) The teachers from Hope demonstrated the characteristics of effective teachers more frequently than the teachers from Walker.

Teachers' Perceptions of Students

Teachers overwhelmingly identified students' needs as the primary factor in their instructional decision-making. However, they couched need in terms of deficits, both academic and non-academic. Identifying what they perceived as deficits in school preparation and in families, teachers spoke at length about what the students could not do. They talked of "those" families where books and school were "not a priority … where students did not have experiences," overlooking that all students have experiences and priorities, although they might differ from those of the teacher. Several teachers spoke with negative connotations about how students differed from their children, or their memories of childhood.

Some teachers spoke at length about the role of poverty in students "lack of readiness." Another suggested that Latino families expressed more interest in their children's schooling than African American families. Similarly, variance in family structure, single parent families for example, was suggested as a reason for students' learning difficulties. Some teachers argued that "if parents would" read to students, or engage in any of a number of behaviors, then the deficits the teachers perceived would no longer present challenges to the teacher or student. Teachers in the study, even those who demonstrated effective teaching behaviors, appeared to employ a deficit thinking model with respect to the students and their abilities (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

Characteristics of Competence

Characteristics of competence for literacy instruction in CLD schools include knowledge of content and instructional strategies, caring, high expectations, knowledge of and respect for differences in the broadest sense. Teachers from both schools demonstrated some degree of competence. However, those from Hope generally displayed more behaviors congruent with effective instruction, across all areas.

Effective instruction requires teachers who are knowledgeable about content and instructional strategies. Competent teachers possess the ability and skills to provide instruction that addresses requisite content, therefore they too must master the content. Delpit (2003) scorned heavily scripted, mandated curriculum, noting that, "we never see these pre-packaged 'teacher-proofed' programs in affluent schools, only in schools serving low-income children and children of color" (p. 17). Teachers must know content and pedagogy in order to provide effective, responsive instruction (Ewing, 2001).

Participant teachers from both schools received similar district wide training, yet displayed different degrees of understanding regarding literacy and instructional strategies. Teachers from Hope spoke fluently about literacy and components of instruction. They also demonstrated instructional strategies congruent with currently preferred practices. Often, those from Walker responded to queries regarding literacy concepts and instructional strategies in highly

idiosyncratic ways. Although they incorporated the language of some preferred practices, they often did so in a way that differed from its expected professional use (e.g., Winnie's definition of literacy as an instructional approach). Thus, their instruction appeared to lack the focus and rigor associated with successful student outcomes.

Competent teachers demonstrate caring for their students; however, caring is rooted in respect and high expectations (Gay, 2000). In a project with Irvine (2002), successful African American teachers of CLD students characterized their role as "other-mothering," in which inextricably entwined with caring exists faith in the student, high expectations, structure and discipline. Teachers from both schools expressed caring for the students; its manifestation differed. While providing or securing provision of adequate funds for field trips or meals, teachers from Hope still held students to a high standard. They cared about their students through "taking care" as well as continued focus on academic development. Teachers from Walker also took care of their students in similar ways, yet their goal was on making them "feel good." They focused upon students as needy children, not students with varied needs. Consequently, the Walker teachers' instruction appeared secondary to "taking care" of students.

Finally, competent teachers demonstrate knowledge of and respect for individual differences across all categories. Differences include race and ethnicity, language, SES, as well as disability. Delpit (2003) asserted, "We must

learn who our children are – their lived culture, their interests, and their intellectual, political, and historical legacies" (p. 20; emphasis in original). Most of the participant teachers in both schools expressed hesitancy about identifying difference, of any sort. "I don't see color," echoed throughout interviews. Teachers remarked similarly about language, SES, and disability. On-going recognition of differences was not observed in any of the schools. Consequently, teachers' lack of acknowledgement resulted in the general absence of students' cultures and interests throughout the classes. Similarly, most teachers claimed to "treat everyone the same" with respect to ability. However, by not individualizing instruction, especially for students identified as receiving special education services, teachers inadvertently do differentiate the quality of instruction students receive; they exclude those students who are function above or below the level at which material is presented.

All teachers demonstrated characteristics of competence to some degree in at least one area. Competent teachers displayed knowledge about content and instructional strategies. They exhibited caring students in a manner that maintained high expectations, discipline, and faith in the student, thus promoting academic development concurrently. Additionally, competent teachers recognized, responded to, and respected a broad range of differences. Teachers from Hope taught in competent ways more frequently than their colleagues from Walker.

Contexts of Competence

Teachers perform within local school and district contexts. Consequently, competence, like teaching is situated in local schools and districts. Identifying the supports and obstacles indigenous to those settings is critical to understanding fully how teachers make decisions for instruction.

School culture

Teachers' shared beliefs significantly define the school's culture; thus, their "beliefs about their capability to educate students constitute a norm that influences the actions and achievements of schools" (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000, p.502). Teachers from Hope appeared confident in the knowledge and ability of their colleagues. First grade teachers stated that a student who came through the school's kindergarten program was likely to be well-prepared for first grade work. Kindergarten teachers referred to other faculty members as resources they had used throughout their tenure. Conversely, teachers from Walker seldom spoke of their colleagues, however occasional grousing was heard regarding another teachers' competence.

Schools with strong leaders, high expectations, and a mission shared across all stakeholders outperform those lacking such characteristics (Scribner & Reyes 1999; Scribner, 1999). Principals at both Hope and Walker were only in their second semester on those campuses and in the primary leadership role. Therefore, previous leadership may hold the key to school climate at each school.

Teachers from Hope reported that their previous principal set very high expectations for them, urging participation in additional workshops and classes, as well as facilitating funding to promote on-site programs. Most teachers from Walker did not mention their previous principal. No one spoke of support for on-going professional development. Interestingly, the new principal at Walker spoke extensively about her plans to facilitate teachers' learning, especially with respect to literacy instruction. Her counterpart at Hope addressed the need to improve teachers' cultural responsiveness, but not literacy.

Both schools appeared to divide down lines of language. Classrooms were grouped by monolingual and bilingual instruction. No interactions between classes of any sort were observed throughout the study. Teachers from Hope spoke to each other while on the playground. Kindergarten teachers from Walker were observed conversing, however the first grade teachers were not seen interacting with other teachers outside of mandatory faculty meetings.

District supports

Within the past few years, the school district issued several new mandates regarding assessment and instruction at the primary level. Teachers were required to administer two tests - twice a year for kindergarten, thrice a year for first grade – that require one to one administration. Rudimentary training was provided regarding administration; however, supports do not exist to address the logistics of testing children one at a time with a class of twenty other primary-aged

children. Consequently, some teachers avoided testing as long as possible and most considered testing days needlessly lost instructional time. In addition, only a few teachers used the tests to inform their instruction. One stated that she used it to confirm what she observed. Another teacher scheduled testing months later than assigned, and sought to avoid an entire round of test administration.

Recently developed, district wide Instructional Planning Guides (IPGs) map out every target skill in every subject are for the entire year. The purpose of the IPG according to district personnel is to provide a certain curricular timeline to ameliorate the challenges encountered by the district's transient students. Teachers suggested the IPGs would be useful for first year teachers; several noted the IPGs really did not fit well with what they planned to do as individual instructors. In fact, one teacher stated outright that as long as she covered the requisite content, she could do so however she wanted. No one mentioned in-service preparation to use the IPGs effectively.

Implications for Practice

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Teachers reported limited preparation for working with CLD and low SES populations. Although avoidance of monolithic identities is crucial, knowledge of cultures, beyond holidays and food, is critical to developing culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In addition, development of cultural knowledge of self is an important first step in understanding those who may be, or may be

perceived as different from oneself (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Few teachers in this study spoke freely about race and ethnicity; only one of six white teachers acknowledged that her racial and ethnic identity differed from most of her students, and that warranted her consideration. Teacher preparation programs that develop pre-service teachers' self-knowledge as well as provide knowledge of others with whom they are unfamiliar, may facilitate more effective instruction through more knowledgeable teachers.

Although all teachers participated in district wide professional development, teachers at Hope demonstrated understanding of the language and meaning associated with current reading research and practice. Unlike their colleagues from Walker, the Hope teachers participated in a grant program which provided a semester of on-site weekly training and coaching, plus access to later follow-up. Several participants noted the collaborative nature of the program, where the trainer and teacher developed lessons and problem-solved together when things went awry. Consistent with prior studies, the retention by Hope teachers suggests that intensive collaborative training provides greater impact than abbreviated, isolated workshops.

Membership in a Learning Community

Teaching can be a very isolative profession. Once at work, teachers attend to their students or tasks related to their instruction. Time and opportunity constraints generally preclude extended interactions with other teachers. All

participants responded to the query about the impact of the study. Each teacher averred that the opportunity to speak with a peer, another teacher, about her profession, her decisions, her thoughts provoked even greater self-reflection. Such was congruent with my experience as a classroom teacher: I wanted to talk about my work, get feedback on my teaching not from a formal evaluator, but from a knowledgeable other with whom I could exchange questions, concerns, ideas, and from whom I could gain feedback and insights into my craft. Informal conversations with other teachers suggest the thirst for a professional learning community is common.

Support from Schools and Districts

As schools and districts continue to augment teachers' responsibilities, they must provide teachers with support, in the form of professional development and additional personnel. Reviewing new materials and assessments, learning both their purpose, use and administration requires time, which teachers seldom have available. Schools and districts can facilitate teachers' professional growth by providing release time and substitute coverage for teachers to participate in development programs. Concurrently, the loss of instructional time to administrative tasks, such as testing, demands attention. With the great emphasis on high stakes testing, the loss of teaching time to assessment seems even more problematic.

Limitations

Qualitative Inquiry Caveats

This study provides information about only eight teachers, as observed and understood by a single researcher. Findings can be neither generalized to others, nor replicated in a positivistic sense. Additionally, although steps were taken to receive feedback from participants regarding interviews, and colleagues reviewed data and preliminary findings for consistency, the final arbiter is a lone researcher combating her own bias and opinions, seeing through her own experiences.

Researcher Bias

Assuming the role of a researcher provided unique challenges to me professionally and personally. A classroom teacher for 17 years in schools serving mostly CLD students, I taught general and special education students in grades k-12. During that time, other roles included mentor for novice teachers, team leader, and host to student teachers. I also worked with nontraditional students in a university writing lab. In graduate school, I supervise pre-service teachers where my role is to facilitate, coach, and provoke reflection. Observing without comment required constant awareness of my positionality as a researcher, a teacher, a forty-something white woman from the northeast.

Concurrently, I worked to maintain awareness of the filters that might preclude me from effectively capturing the teachers' lived experiences, their understandings and perceptions. Employing participants' drawings as an added data source provided an opportunity for participants' expression in a more personal way without the usual filter of a researcher (Daniels, 2003). Weis and Fine (2000, p. 51) observed, "The mundane rituals of daily living...are typically left out of ethnographic descriptions of life in poverty. They do not make good reading, and yet these are the stuff of daily life. We recognize how careful we need to be so that we do not construct life narratives spiked only with hot spots." I strove to provide a description that included both the mundane and the hot spots.

Future Research

The current descriptive study suggests need for further exploration of teachers' understanding of literacy and effective reading instruction, as well as avenues to promote greater application of the information to which they are exposed. In addition, the ubiquitous presence of deficit thinking remains problematic. How can teacher preparation and professional development programs move teachers, and the educational system, away from that model to one that celebrates and utilizes students' knowledge to enhance their academic success? As stated by Weis and Fine (2000, p. 56-57), Social researchers must create vision and imagination for 'what could be' and demand the resurrection of

an accountable public sphere that has a full and participatory citizenship at heart." We have a responsibility to move from "what could be" to "what is."

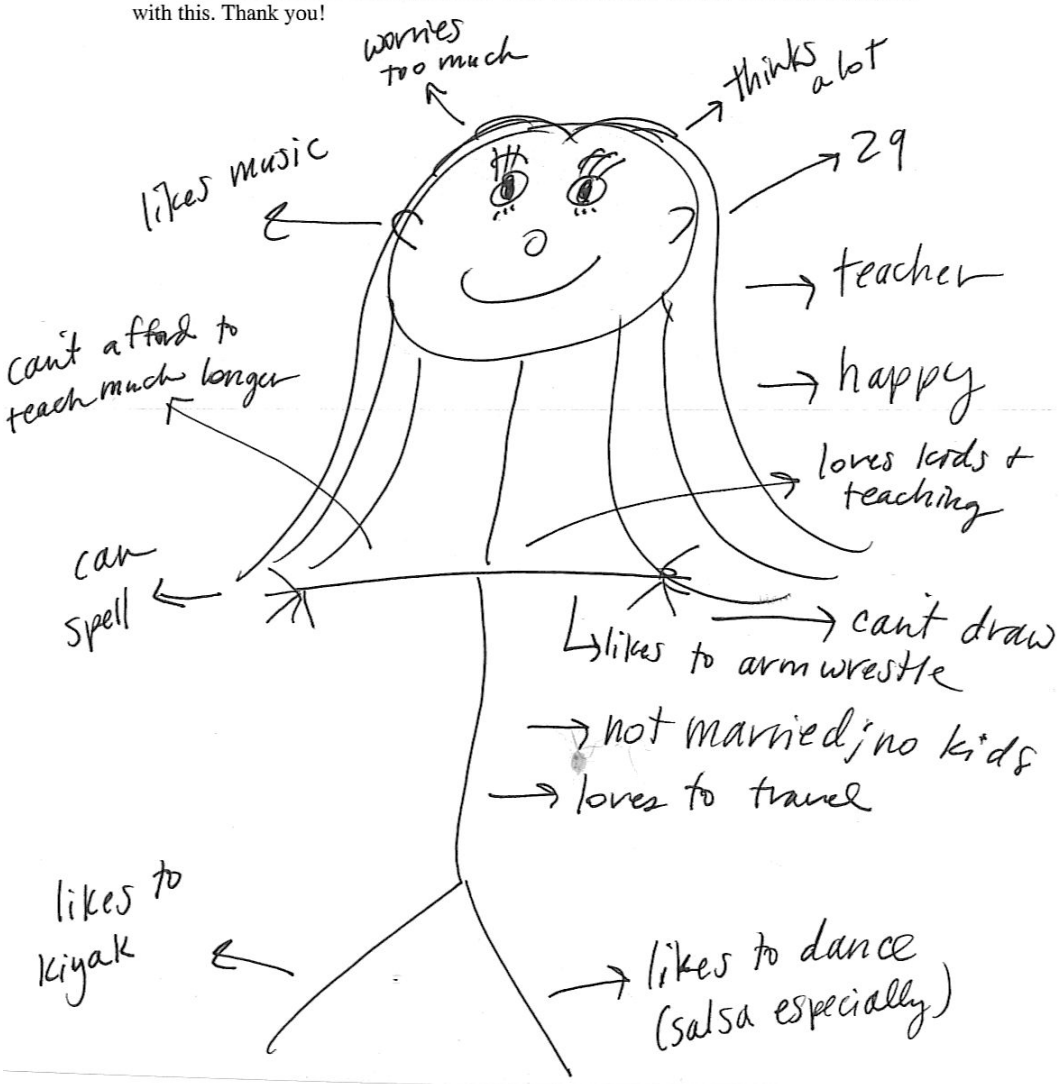
Appendix A: Participants

	Hope Elementary	**Walker Elementary**
Kindergarten	Meg Martin 29 years old 4th year teaching White Bachelors Degree	Sue Snow 29 years old 6th year teaching White Bachelors Degree
	Dora Dunn 45 years old 19th year teaching White Bachelors Degree	Hilary Harry 45 years old 16th year teaching White Masters Degree
First Grade	Oma Orton 48 years old 5th year teaching White Masters Degree	Nan Noddings 34 years old 4th year teaching White Bachelors Degree
	Cara Clay >55 years old 41st year teaching African American Bachelors Degree	Winnie Watson 51 years old 23rd year teaching African American Bachelors Degree

Appendix B: Participant's Self Descriptive Drawings

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to understate the matter), so my pictures usually look more like the graphic organizers we do with the kids for pre-writing than any kind of art work! Please, just have some fun with this. Thank you!



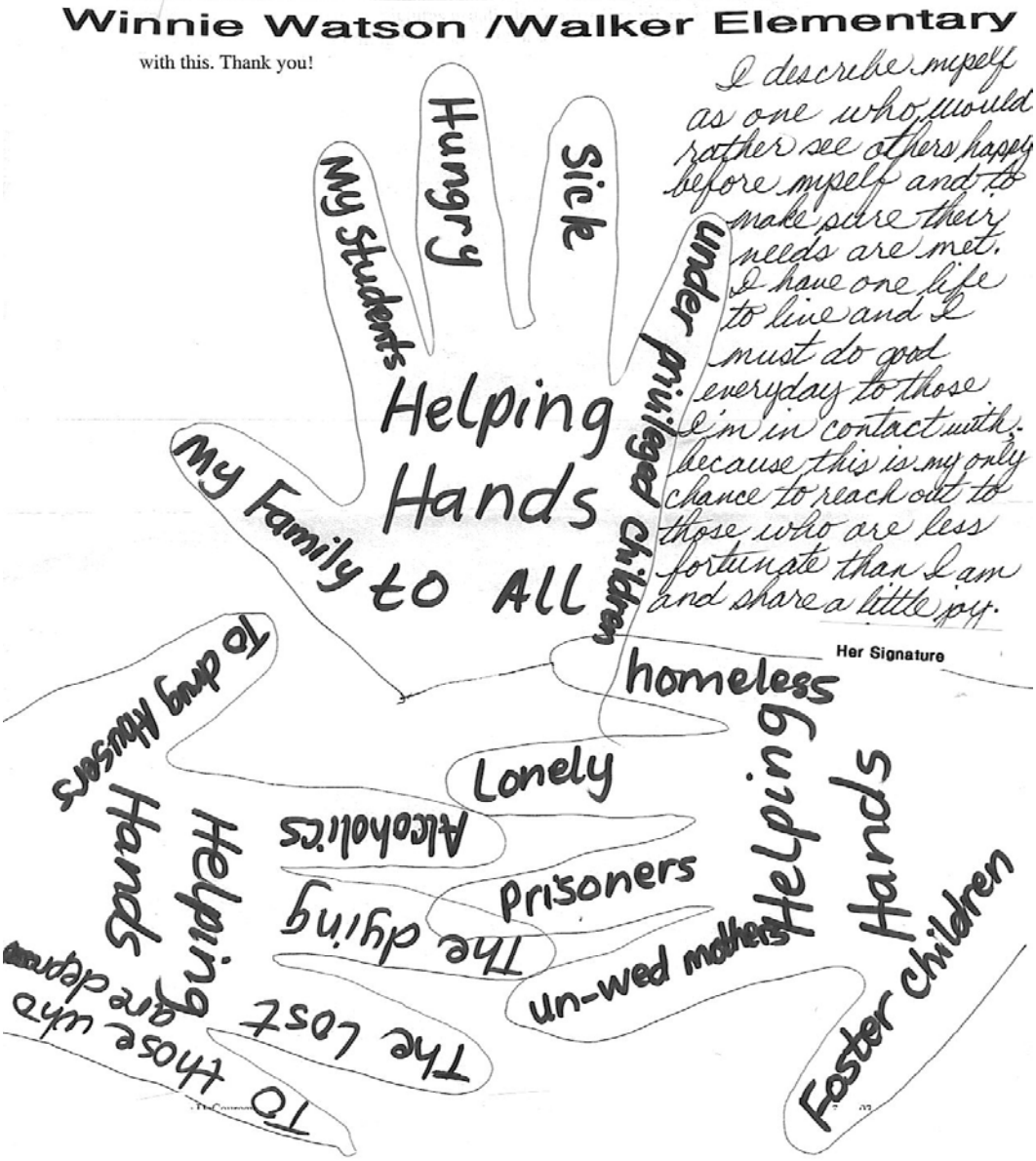
Meg Marshall /Hope Elementary

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

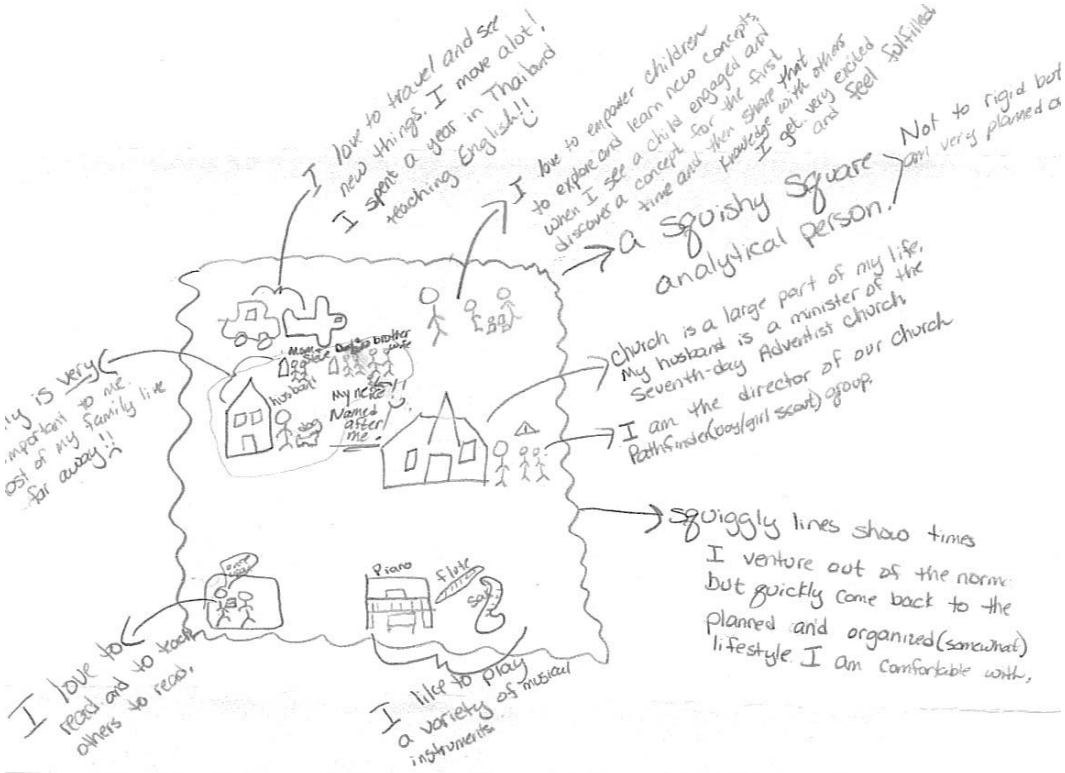
Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to

Winnie Watson /Walker Elementary

with this. Thank you!



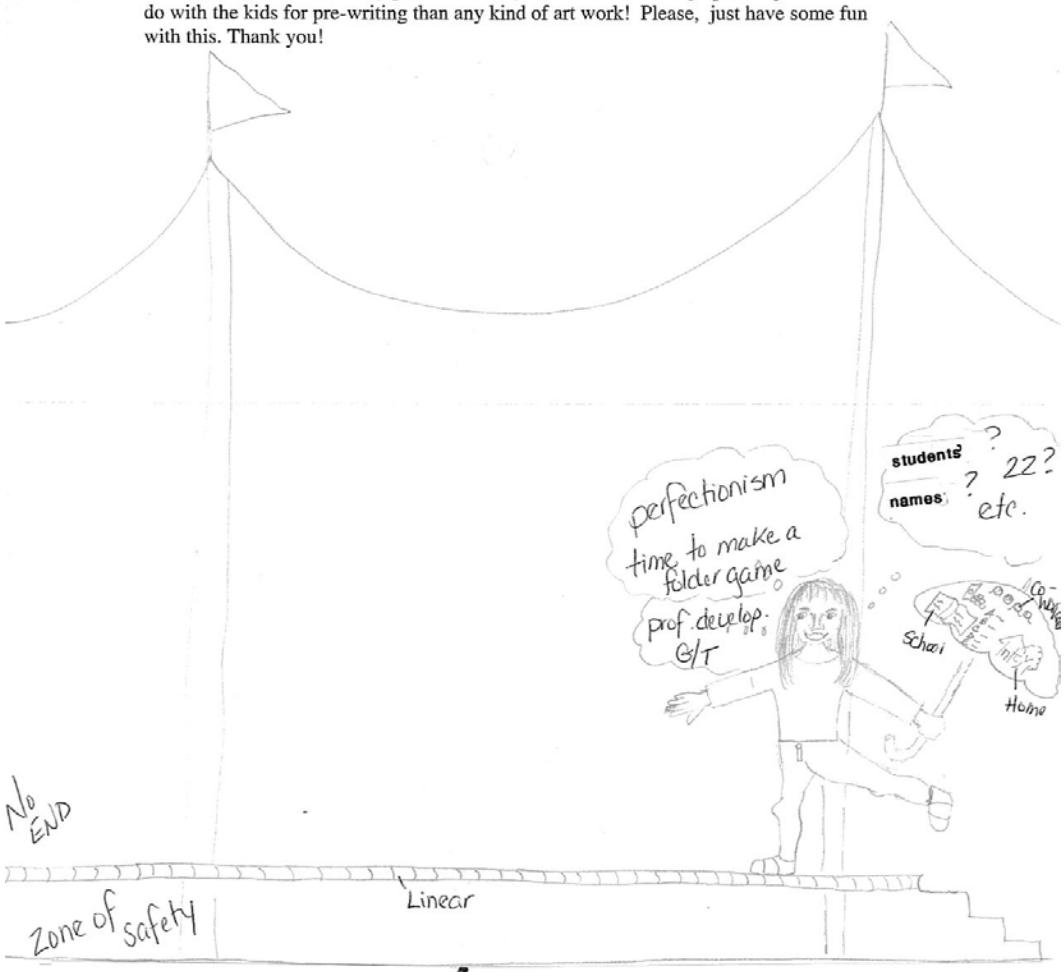
My descriptive drawing (writing!)



Sue Snow /Walker Elementary

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to understate the matter), so my pictures usually look more like the graphic organizers we do with the kids for pre-writing than any kind of art work! Please, just have some fun with this. Thank you!



Nan Noddings/Walker Elementary

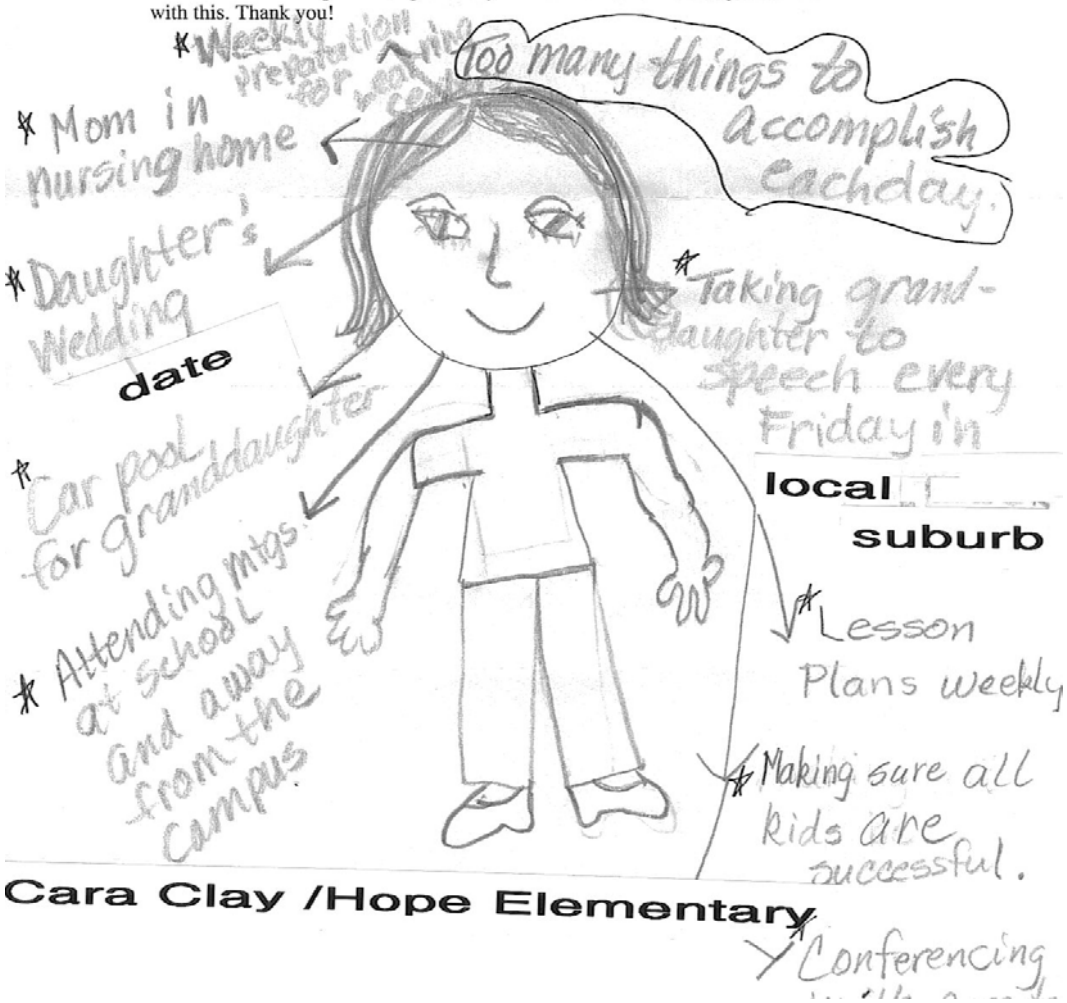
TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to

Oma Orton /Hope Elementary

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

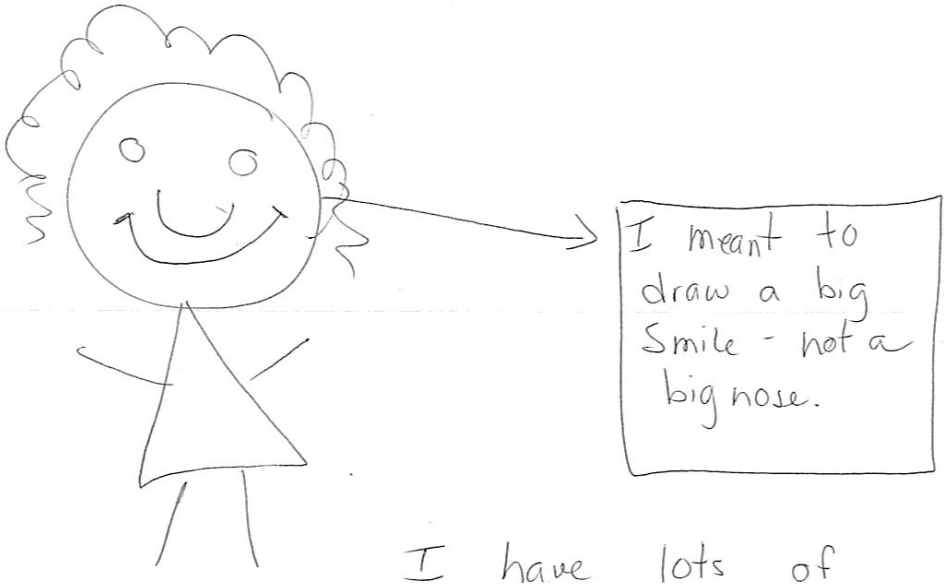
Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to understate the matter), so my pictures usually look more like the graphic organizers we do with the kids for pre-writing than any kind of art work! Please, just have some fun with this. Thank you!



Cara Clay /Hope Elementary

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to understate the matter), so my pictures usually look more like the graphic organizers we do with the kids for pre-writing than any kind of art work! Please, just have some fun with this. Thank you!



I have lots of fun with my class and laugh a lot. I know I am fortunate to have a job that ~~makes~~ allows me to have fun and be challenged.

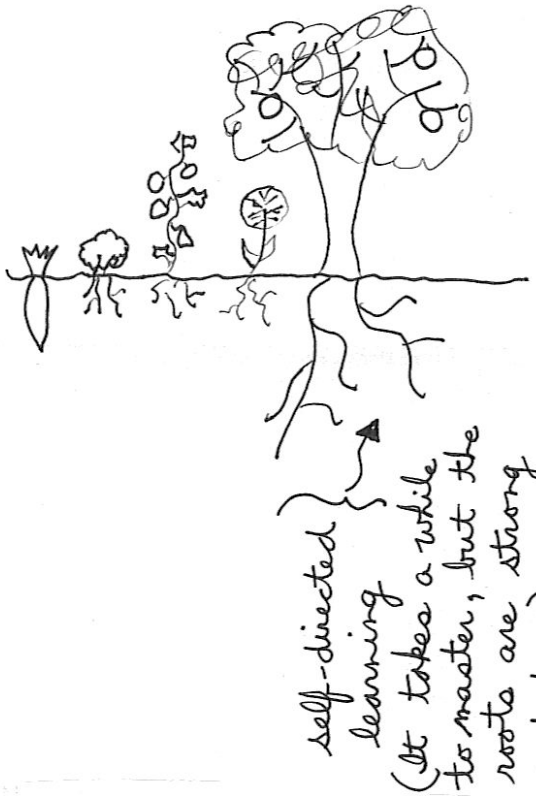
Dora Dunn /Hope Elementary

TEACHER SURVEY
For
DISSERTATION STUDY

Draw a picture of some sort to describe yourself, and label the components; draw any kind of pictorial representation that works for you. Personally, I'm not very artistic (to understate the matter), so my pictures usually look more like the graphic organizers we do with the kids for pre-writing than any kind of art work! Please, just have some fun with this. Thank you!

Hilary Harris /Walker Elementary

I think labeling myself as a "gardener" encompasses my teaching. Although I may not see the "harvest", I know I've planted many seeds!



Appendix C: Interview Protocols

PARTICIPANT CODE: _____ INTERVIEW #1

1. Tell me what literacy looks like at the (K, 1 level, your school).
    a. Specifically, what does reading look like?
    b. Include content, student behaviors, learning environment.
    c. What do you perceive as your options for literacy instruction?
2. Describe the students in your class as literacy learners.
3. What do you see as some of the strengths that these students bring as literacy learners?
    a. How do you determine those strengths?
    b. How do you incorporate those strengths in your instruction?
4. What do you see as some of the challenges/needs that these students bring as literacy learners?
    a. How do you determine those needs?
    b. How do you address those in your instruction?
5. Overall, how do you address differences (as you teach/in your school)? {Possible probes: disability/ability, race/ethnicity, language, SES)
    a. When I say the word, "difference" what comes to your mind? When I say "at-risk", what comes to your mind?
    b. Tell me more about (whatever comes out of "differences") wrt your decisions for literacy instruction.
        i. How do you identify (stated difference)?
        ii. What would be some signs that this difference impacts the student's literacy learning?
        iii. If there was a negative impact upon the student's literacy learning, when would intervention start, and what would it look like?
6. What resources do you have/use for/with your students as literacy learners?
   (ALTERNATE for Principals/Reading Specialists: What resources do you provide to your faculty who teach literacy skills and/or reading/language arts?)

Interview #2 Questions Participant Code:_____

1) What factors influence your decision making for instruction?
    a. How do those decisions differ for kids who are struggling with literacy?
    b. How do those decisions vary based upon CLD characteristics?
    c. Upon SES?
    d. Upon ability/disability?
2) How do IMPACT decisions impact your instructional decisions of the target child and for the class?
3) How is tutoring differentiated from classroom instruction?
4) How do your decisions for teaching shape your students' learning/ outcomes?
5) How has your decision making for literacy/reading instruction evolved during your career?
6) To what do you attribute the changes or maintenance of your instructional decision-making? Why?
7) Please respond to the following statements, indicating your agreement or disagreement, as well as the reasoning behind your response.
    a. The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background.
    b. If students aren't disciplined at home, they aren't likely to accept any discipline.
    c. When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students.
    d. A teacher is very limited in what she can achieve b/c a student's home environment is a large influence on his/her achievement.
    e. If parents would do more for their children, I could do more.
    f. If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson.
    g. If a student in my class becomes disruptive and noisy, I feel assured that I know some techniques to redirect him/her quickly.
    h. If one of my students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.
    i. If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.
    j. When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much b/c most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his/her home environment.
8) How have our discussions influenced your literacy instruction or teaching?

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